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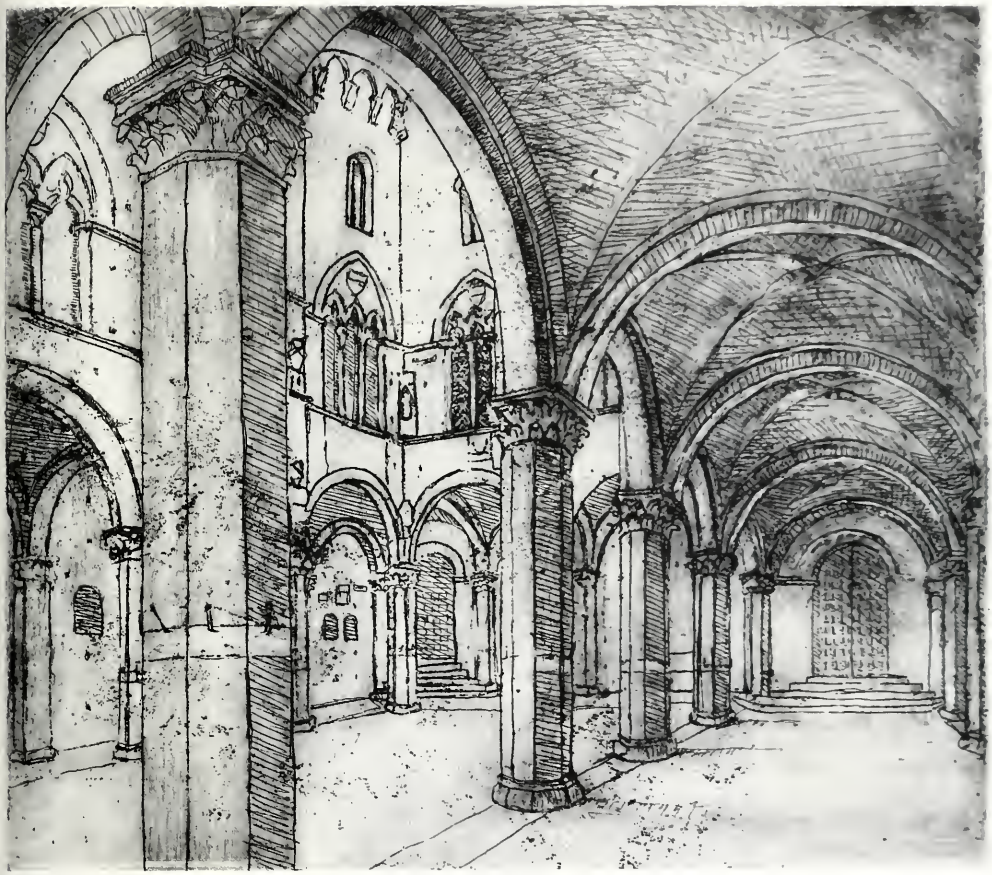

Palazzo Publico Courtyard Lawrence Sexton

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Spring 1985

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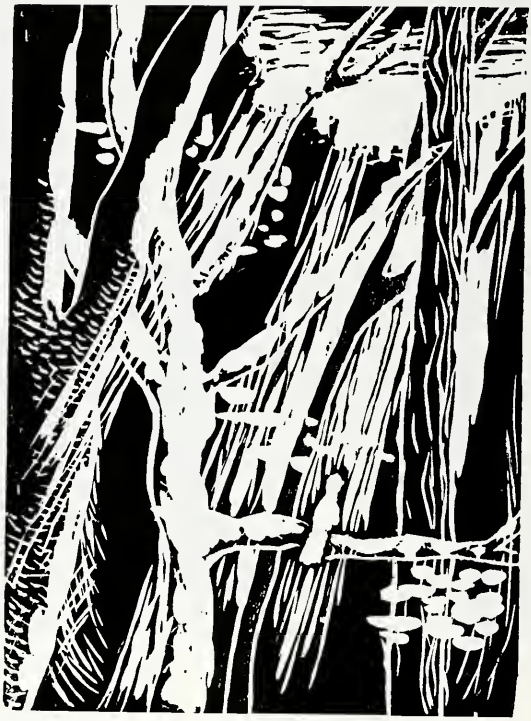
CORADD

the magazine of the fine arts at U

Spring 1985

The self-portrait on the cover is by W. Chris Horney, a junior Art major.



Spring reprinted from *Coraddi* 1952 Claire Cox

Poetry Competition Winners

Grand Prize, John York
Second Place, Elizabeth Smith-Botsch
Third Place, Rodney A. Craven
Honorable Mention, John Pfaff

Art Competition Winners

Grand Prize, Jane Ann Kepley
Second Place, Michael Read
Third Place, James Fore
Honorable Mentions, Paul C. Pulley, Lawrence Sexton, Micha
Read

Honorable Mention

Lawrence Sexton

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August Rent

We'll take better to a place
without this great heat and rain,
without the pests that creep in this carpet.
The rent check curls in this damp envelope —
use our deposit to fix the neighbor's
broken pipes and enlarge the windows
in this basement hole. We will not care
beside a northern bay, enjoying
"clams from certified waters"
and laughing at the joke stamped
on each crate. The water pulls —
down there each shelled
inhabitant has a diploma stating
it is worthy and willing to be caught.
We're travelling north to find the fall
nights of fifty degrees and clear sun
in the morning the monochrome of bright
pumpkins. For the rustle of sudden
purple clouds presaging a great storm
flat above the brown trees, that ends
with hail ripping out clear stars.
Hail big enough to save in the freezer
for unbelieving grandchildren; hail
enough for a final ending of the heat,
white and definite as the first ice age.
A beginning perfect and hopeful
as the end of old stories, where prop planes
wink their lights to land,
each character at his end and peace
and each work done perfectly.
To close the book with an audible sigh,
as the passengers still wait
at the tiny airport, watching the lights,
ready to assume the sky.

Rodney A. Craven

Herr Rosenberger's Practice Run

I am ready to go,
now that the sun is down
and the cat is fed.
I have left a note
on the kitchen table
that says:
"I am very, very tired."
Farewell to the moan
of foghorns, to a coast
where the waves have an
angry look and cough up
strange driftwood.

I stand and wait
the inevitable streetcar,
on the L-Taraval line.
It appears as a faint candle,
a single wobbling globe.
It arrives creaking, empty,
and faded green; humming
on the lines awaiting me.
I will place faith in metal,
the electric mast. Motorman,
bear me across these terraces
to the holy city's shore.

Jon M. Obermeyer

James Foré

The Dawn To Dusk, Cash and Carry, Everything Must Go Divorce Sale

by barbara frediani

When my sister Coco's twenty-one year marriage officially ended, she had a divorce sale. "Everything must go," she said. "I don't want any of this stuff around anymore. Too many memories." I tried to tell her it didn't work that way, but she was determined. So she took a two-column ad in the weekly newspaper that read:

> DIVORCE SALE: Twenty-one years of accumulation. Furnishings, cookware, dishes, draperies, etc. Dawn to dusk, cash and carry, everything must go. Saturday, October 10th, #7 Butternut Court.

She put up posters at the grocery stores and on telephone poles. I asked her if she wasn't embarrassed to advertise her divorce all over town that way. "Why should I be embarrassed?" she replied. "Everyone in town knows anyway. When we got separated last year, it was the juiciest piece of gossip that Heartsease had chewed on since Ralph Bynum got hauled away by those federal agents." I reminded Coco that Ralph had been caught embezzling from the government in his post office job, which was a little different than inviting people to a divorce sale. I suggested that she call a dealer in second-hand merchandise. "No way," she objected. "I don't want a dealer to buy my stuff. I want to know where everything goes, Jess - whose houses it'll be in from now on."

Right, I thought. Just like all those puppy dogs and kitty cats you put up for adoption when you were little instead of packing them off to the pound. It got so when a litter of unwanted animals was born, the neighbors would call on Coco, who knocked on doors until each one was placed with a deserving family. Now she's president of the Burwell County Humane Society, and has a bumper sticker that says "Control the Pet Population - Spay or Neuter Pets!"

Coco is the baby of the family, though she's thirty-nine yea now. Her given name is Margaret,but when she was just a thing, we nicknamed her Coco because she loved to drin chocolate with marshmallows melted in it. You could alway when she'd had a cup from the foamy brown moustache tha left on her upper lip.

She and Maurice were married the year after Daddy died, she was eighteen. In the lacy, pearled bridal gown that Mam I had worked on for months, Coco looked like the tiny bride o of the wedding cake our sister Pauline had made. Coco's wed was a real family affair. Two of us had run away to get mar one was married quietly in the minister's study, and the only church ceremony had been one of our brother's. But the gro family just follows the bride's instructions and shows up a church at the appointed time. Coco was the first real *bride* i family and we put our all into making it a memorable occasion. sisters-in-law organized the reception in the church hall, wit husband George setting up the folding chairs and card tables. brother took the pictures, and the other walked Coco down the a

After the wedding, Coco went with her husband to Iowa, w he attended the Palmer College of Chiropractic. It thrilled u know that Coco had practically married a doctor. For two y we missed her terribly, but after his graduation, they returne Heartsease and settled down.

Maurice was very successful. The farmers from surrounding munities had a lot of back problems, and rheumatism and arth flourished among the senior citizens of Heartsease. When Mau

ed a partner and opened a chiropractic clinic, Coco decorated iting room with plants, an aquarium (to relax the patients), w silk draperies. They built a large ranch house in a new sion called Laurel Crest and raised a family of two boys and sterile pets.

year, Maurice had confessed to falling in love with a lady ractor he had met at a national convention. He sold out his of the clinic and moved to Texas to open a practice with her. vas welcome to the house and its contents, the Oldsmobile, assbook savings, and the fold-down camper. He took his truck hing boat, some stocks and bonds, and the money from selling his partner. It was all very civil. Even their lawyers were sed at the ease with which everything was settled.

boys, both students at the state university, were called home eekend to select the items they wanted to keep out of Coco's e sale. They accepted their mother's decision to sell the house erything in it and start over. At 18 and 19, they were aglow ne first blush of independence and preoccupied with their ac- s at school. Besides, their father had never spent much time nem, so his relocation to Texas didn't make much difference. sentimental attachments were mostly to battered tennis s and old musical instruments in need of repair, which they in my attic. They wished Coco luck in getting rid of "all that and returned to school.

night before the sale, George drove me over to Coco's house. offered to spend the night and help out the next day. It was s we pulled into Butternut Court and the sky above the trees ed with a red glow. "Red sky at night, sailor's delight," said e. "Looks like Coco will have good weather for this fool sale s." I said goodnight, gave him a peck on the cheek and took ernight bag. For a moment after he left, I stood on the lawn oked at the house. It was ablaze with light and all the win- were open. I could see Coco scurrying first into this room, nto that room, all the while humming "Row, row, row your a tune she had resorted to since childhood in busy or intense ions. We used to sing it in rounds on hot summer afternoons Mama made us rest. I opened the door and yoo-hooed at her he appeared, smiling, at the kitchen doorway. "Jess, you ' she said. "You're always there, aren't you?"

talked about her plans for the future as we put price tags ms in the kitchen cupboards. Coco had her eye on a small house in town near the neighborhood where we had grown ne had registered for the winter term at the local community e, and hoped to be accepted for their nursing program in the g. She seemed excited about it, but admitted that she was a scared about being in a classroom again after all these years. had always wanted to be a nurse, but marriage and two babies urned into little boys had put her personal plans on the back r. "Its my turn now," she said. "A new beginning. It's like ig two lives for the price of one." I told her she sounded like ico TV salesman, selling kitchen knives. We giggled at one favorite jokes. "But that's not all!!!" she said like the fren- voice on the television commercial.

worked late into the night tagging things, but mostly leav- nem in their places. Coco's idea was to open the house, let- he shoppers browse through the rooms. She felt items would more appeal in their own setting, rather than dumped in a the garage and yard. "That way," she added, "we don't have eak our backs hauling this stuff all over the place. Strictly cash arry."

ll, I wondered how she would feel watching people wander gh her house, handling the merchandise of her marriage, and ing it off. She seemed brisk and businesslike as we worked, but I heard the hum of her tune from the master bedroom, the "merrily, merrily, merrily" part trailing off into silence. Life's fickle, I thought. Just when you think you've got the rhythm, the current changes and you have to start all over again, rowing in a different pattern. I put the price on a cross-stitched indian proverb: "Love many, trust few, always paddle your own canoe." Five dollars, including frame - a good deal.

We got up the next morning about five o'clock, started a thirty-cup percolator, and set out styrofoam cups and napkins on the kitchen table. Coco warmed up several coffee cakes and sliced them, and I put out some cream and sugar. Alot of those who'd be coming were friends, neighbors, and even relatives, and Coco had always been the perfect hostess. "I just couldn't invite people to my home and not offer them something," she said emphatically.

When we opened the door to the first customers at 6:30, the smell of coffee and cinammon was drifting through the rooms of the house, and the warmth of the blaze Coco had kindled in the fireplace had cut the morning chill. You would have thought we were giving a neighborhood coffee klatch.

It was estimated by my husband George that five hundred or so people responded to Coco's advertising. Coco and I had refilled the huge coffee pot six times. George and our son George, Jr. directed traffic and helped load heavy items into pickup trucks. Coco made over $3500 on everything from patio furniture to a king-sized waterbed.

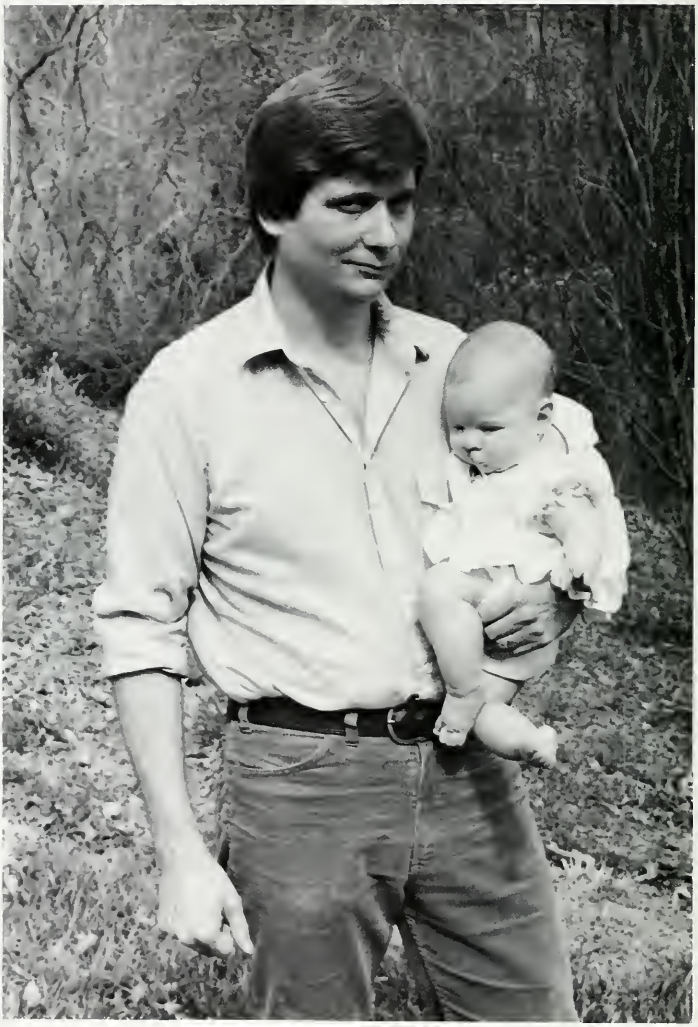
Most folks were eager for a bargain, like Mrs. Farlow who was a professional yard sale shopper. She offered $75 for the contents of the buffet in the dining room, sight unseen, when she caught a glimpse of the crystal behind one of the doors. Others were curious, like our second cousin Hannah Jones. She cornered me and wanted to know all the intimate details of Coco's divorce. "I always thought that husband of hers was no good," she said. I managed to let her do most of the talking, just grunting and nodding my head alot. It seemed to satisfy her. Hannah bought back the shower gift she had given Coco twenty-one years ago, a set of pastel Tupperware containers, for $1.50. "The seals still burp as good as new," she said.

Everyone familiar to us talked about Maurice in the past tense, as if he were dead. They told Coco how sorry they were and asked if there was anything, anything at all, that they could do for her. Coco smiled and said she appreciated it, but that she was all set. She had her ducks in a row, she said, and she was ready to put the past behind her and look to the future. They all commented on her bravery.

Just before dusk, when the crowd was beginning to thin out, I heard a tinkling musical sound coming towards us in the kitchen. I recognized the unmistakable strains of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." Coco and I turned away from a chat with some of her neighbors to see an elderly woman approach with an opened music box. "Found this darling thing away back on a closet shelf. I can't find a price tag. What do you want for it, dear?" Coco held out her hands and the woman placed the lacquered box in one of her palms. Inside, a tiny female figure sat in a rowboat, each hand grasping an oar. The boat rested on a tinted blue mirror, and as the music tinkled on, the woman in the boat rowed and rowed, but not a ripple stirred on the blue lake. I remembered seeing the box on Coco's bureau. It had been an anniversary present from Maurice.

Coco smiled at the woman and shook her head. "I'm sorry," she said, "but this item is not for sale." The figure in the boat rowed more and more slowly as the box unwound its tune. The woman looked disappointed until Coco smiled and said, "But perhaps you'd be interested in the Swiss clock in the living room. It plays 'Edelweiss' and I'll let it go for a song."

John York



poems

Passing Bear Creek

Riding toward a magenta horizon
    cleansed by a northeast wind,
riding over piedmont swells and among
farmhouses and dark hardwoods, or under limbs
twining and spreading into the sky,
    we become silent,
our faces reflecting the softening light.

We pass a sign: Bear Creek 3
and I imagine my father opening
a screen door and smiling, then telling us
Your Mama has supper ready. A frame house,
its downstairs windows lit all around,
sits on a hill above a corncrib,
a shed, a large barn. Across a far pasture
Bear Creek flows like a copper chain.

But later, at an intersection, we take
the main highway, aim to the right
of the Little Dipper; at a suburban door
my father-in-law grins and says *Come on in,*
while my father sits in his long brick house,
half-empty—another wife has left—

his house in another city, to the west,
my mother and sister beyond: though my wife's
people laugh, though the TV whitens the room
and a fire wavers, I find myself
wandering along Bear Creek, below a dark house:
I float through brush, through fog, among poplars,
back to where the stream begins, where it
dribbles then purls, fretting blackish stones.

Mowing for Grandmothers: Granny York's Yard on Irving Street

A strip by the street,
then little squares on both sides
of the stone walk take a few strides
on my broganned feet.

Mower - mower, mowee!
the machine sings under shrubbery,
out-yammering Granny
who stands akimboed, watching me.

She walks down her driveway
while I mow the side
yard, long like a dog run, but not wide
enough for a chihuahua.

Granny directs in the back,
motions toward missed patches, warns
of stumps, suspects me of speeding around
the triangular track.

Mowing for Grandmothers:
Grandma Spencer's, Rockford Road

Grandma Spencer shells peas in her kitchen,
while I vaporize dandelions, crab
and other grasses out front, where in September
cousins will grab
for the football, stoop for pears,
dodge yellow-jackets. I mow around one side

until the weedy circle disappears,
then the other, but slowly, mower growling
at the septic tank for growing
the grass so high. I mow the wide

back yard up to the first row of the garden,
then step back and forth, the mower
fussing around forsythia, nandinas,
crape myrtles, camellias,
until its buzzy timbre
fades to a sputter, and I trudge in for a shower.
In the kitchen Grandma looks out a window,
turns and says, *Looks mighty fine.*

In the evening, I crawl out a window,
climb, then sit astraddle the apex,
the black-shingled roof sloping, like golden
eagle's down-sweeping wings, easing over
the yard, the power line,
then over tobacco, soybeans, corn, clover,
pines, oaks, poplars, ferns, galax,
until Grandma calls me and whippoorwills start calling,
while over the grass fireflies are rising and falling.

Eleventh Grade: 1971
-- for Hayes and Gail McNeill

All morning low clouds rain on black-gray hills,
  on flat buildings, while we sit
in fluorescent light, or while we nudge to fit
under walkway's covers. Mini-skirted girls

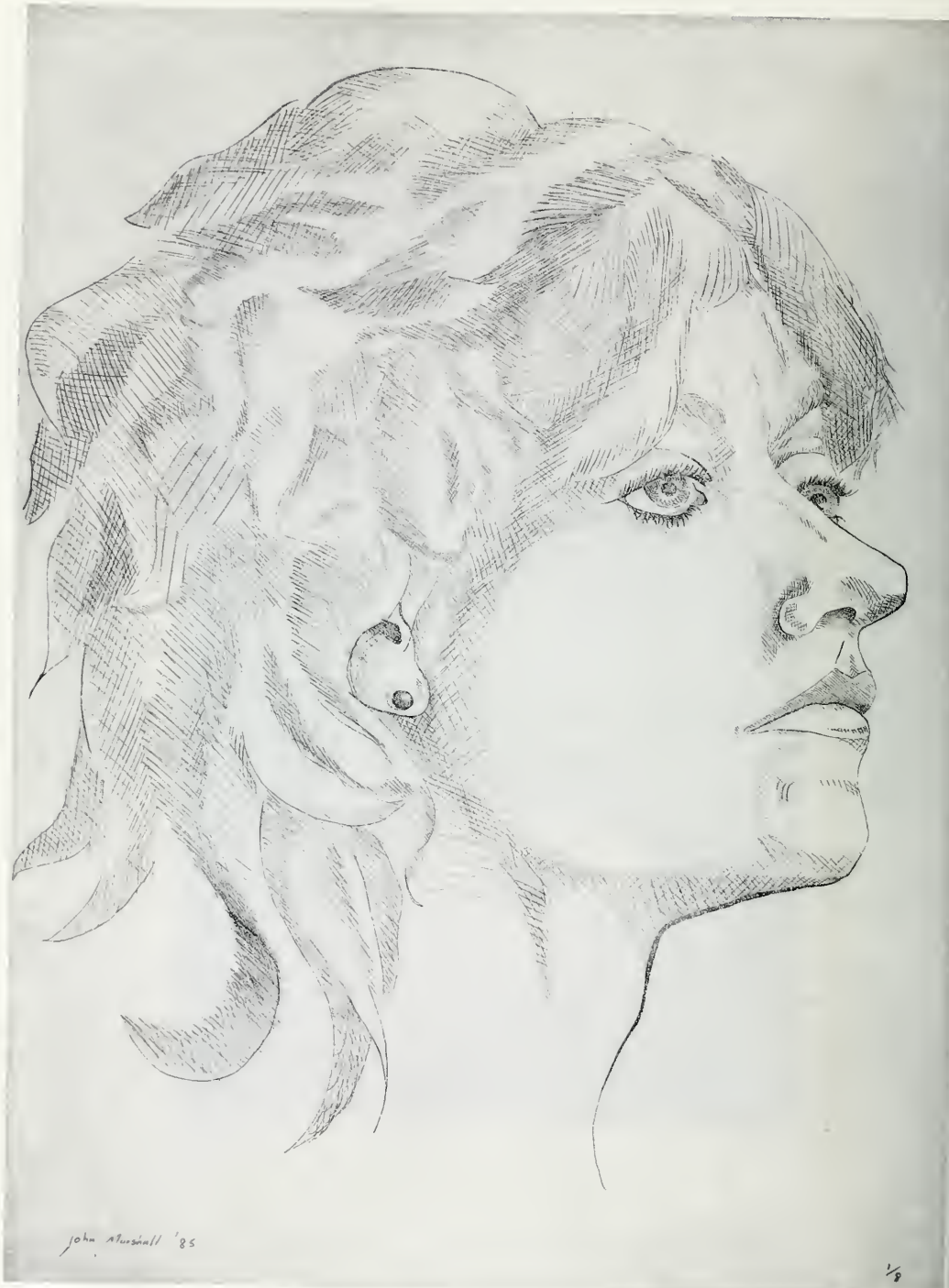
watch each other flirt with the quarterback,
  while uncrossing legs spark
daydreams, while Mr. Green chats with Miss Clark,
while I sit invisible in the back
of the room, where I imagine rock tunes
  and write "Richard Nixon
lies / The eagle skeleton cries": and on

and on the verses flow: while Mr. Jones
discusses the wrestling team's current season,
  while Miss Clark reviews the days
of the week (*loondi, merdi, macradi...*)
while equations loom up behind Miss Gleeson.

  But Mr. McNeill walks in as the bell
rings and proclaims *There was a child went forth*
every day. After class, I show him my song,
  and he says *This image is strong,*
this one flies: and I sing as I trot to sixth
period gym, though my songs will never sell,
though, instead of baskets, I zap teammates' heads,

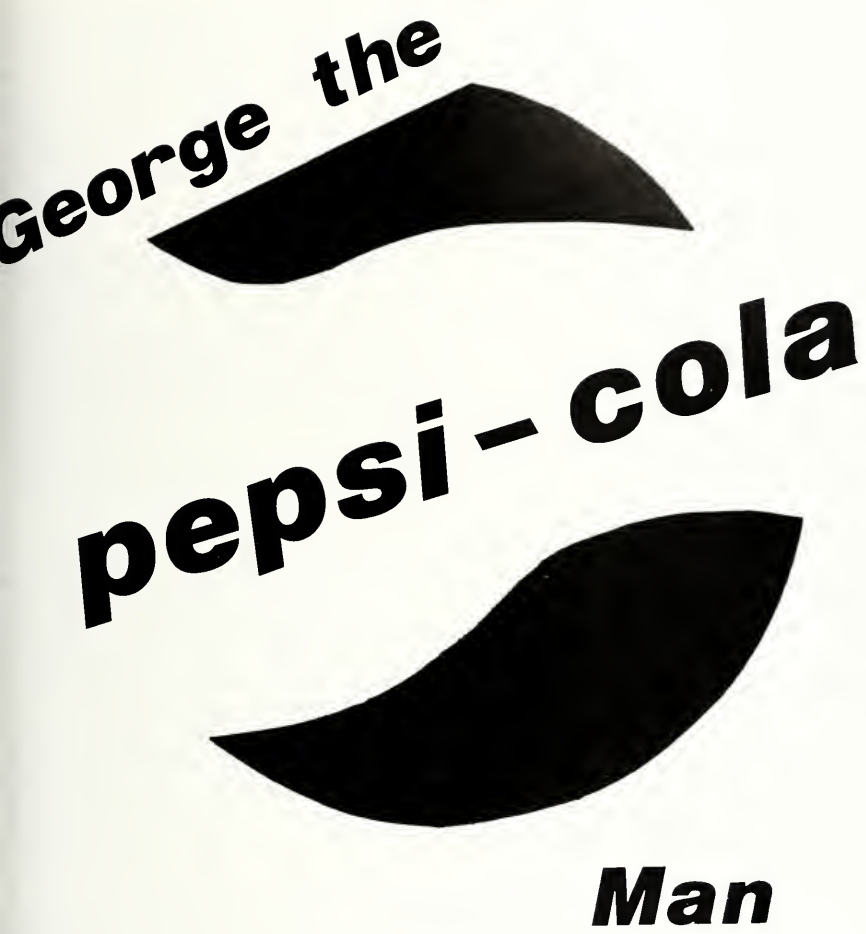
  though "my mind has been cornered, a rusting gun,"
though "in freezing rain my soul has bowed like grass,"
  though "my faraway drummer has
    been thumping a practice pad":
  I've been alerted, thawed,
    charged, aimed, fired, called
      to march at last.

Michael Read



Rebecca

John Marshall



by Leah Griffin

hen I woke up I was still drunk on account of what Johnny to me. Usually, I'm not much of a drinker, but, last night my balls were floating. I walked into Johnny's, still sweaty from oading pepsi-cola crates, and Johnny says,

I saw your ex last night, George."

Oh yeah? How'd she look?" I replied.

Pretty damn good—she was with a fellow that worked for IBM. e way they talked, it sounds like Lisa is gonna get married again.

od news, eh? No more alimony bills!"

I guess I must have been pretty quiet for a while before Johnny was punching me in the arm, saying "I thought you were over that woman, George, it's been six months."

Then, he fixed me a double shot of Jack, on the house. At the time, I thought that it sure was nice to have the bartender as a personal friend of mine, in my time of need. Right now, I don't think so. My alarm clock is screaming like some kind of Terradactyl bird in my ear and the room is still spinning. I count the hours of sleep I got: two and a half. I know that I gotta be on the road

in an hour, so I wait for the room to slow down, and then I get up.

Picking up my rumpled uniform, I decide to wash it by hand, because I don't have enough time for the 36 minute wash and rinse cycle my Kenmore washer uses. Actually, I am quite proud of my washer and dryer. I got one of the $299 deals at Sears. Also, Sears has just extended my credit by $500. After I get the washer/dryer paid off; and the VCR paid off—then I've got my eye on a small freezer. Not too small. One big enough to store venison in.

Searching the trailer for some Woolite, I keep thinking about Lisa. She must have taken the Woolite with her too, like she took nearly everything else I own. I pour Joy dishwashing liquid over my dirty work shirt. Joy's as good as anything else, I suppose. I swear to God, that if I am ever fool enough to get married again, that I am going to force the woman to sign a contract. If we happen to split up, whatever she brought into the marriage, she can take it with her. But no woman is gonna lay another hand on my property. I've got a pretty nice place now. Lisa took most of the furniture, but you can find some pretty good stuff in the ad-pak. I bought my bed and living room sofa from some Mexican, who was advertising in the ad-pak. I was kind of suspicious, because the Mexican would only accept cash. But I couldn't pass up the deal—$70 for both items. The furniture looks real good in my double wide trailer. I've just added a deck in the back. My roommate helped me build that deck two weeks ago. I had to get a roommate to help with the bills when Lisa moved out. The trailer park is not a bad place to live. The dues include trash pick up, water, and a security patrol, so I don't have to always worry about my belongings. In fourteen and a half years, the trailer will be all mine. There is no way I'm going to let Lisa take my home away from me.

I can't stop thinking about Lisa as I wring out my uniform. It's not so much the fact that she is getting married again. She's a real looker, she was bound to get married again. The thing that pisses me off is that she is getting married to an IBM-er. Johnny says those fellows are worth $70,000 a year. Now that she has taken half of everything I've worked for, I can just picture Lisa, sitting pretty in her Christian Dior, in some suburban ranch house. It makes by blood boil.

After a bowl of Apple Jacks and a cup of coffee, I feel better. A little bleary-eyed, but the caffeine and sugar are waking me up. I climb into my red, white and blue Pepsi-Cola truck, and start the six wheeler up. My head still feels a little woozy, but being on the road, I begin to sober up. This morning I am carrying a full load: 500 cases, each case filled with 24 bottles of pepsi-cola. And I'm responsible for each and every bottle. If I show up at the company with one bottle missing, I have to pay for the whole case. A case would cost me $10. That's why I'm real good about checking the back door of the truck, every time I bring it home. The company has been nice to me. My boss lets me drive my truck home, since Lisa took the car. Things are easier if I can just load up in the evening and then set off on my route directly from my trailor, at 6:00 a.m. The company has really started giving me more privileges, since I got moved up to Sales Representative.

I start thinking about last night again as I hit the highway. Some of the things I did and said at Johnny's Bar and Grill, make me cringe. It's women that seem to cause all my problems. I can't stop myself from remembering my fiasco at trying to pick up the cocktail waitress. I was feeling so bad about Lisa—I really needed a female to start appreciating me. The only girl in the bar that wasn't with some red-neck was Johnny's waitress. So, I kept complimenting her. I was sitting at the bar and everytime she came around to hand Johnny her drink orders, I commented on how goodlooking she was.

"Hey, honey, I sure would like to see you in a pair of hot pants. Your legs would be a definite asset to this establishment."

She only frowned at me and was real quick to load up h with the brightly colored glasses. The next time she came ba a drink order, I caught her arm and said,

"Aw, come on, honey. I didn't mean to give you a hard ti do have nice legs! But, I'm a decent fellow—I wouldn't tr bad. Don't you like to have fun?"

She told me that she occasionally liked to have fun. Ev could see that she was starting to come on to me. So I asked

"What do you say? We can go to the mall, Saturday. I'll h a blouse and maybe a pair of slacks. Then, we can go up Lobster and get all-you-can-eat shrimp. Doesn't that sound

She burst into a high pitched laughter that shook the h

"Listen to this guy's idea of the ideal date, Johnny," she ed, "Slacks, a blouse, and all-you-can-eat shrimp!"

Of course, I turned red, but I was so depserate and dr didn't know what I was doing. Johnny told her to go tend her He tried to cheer me up by putting one of those little Japane brella decorations in my Budweiser. The decoration was re ty; made out of purple crepe paper and toothpicks. I think mostly puts them in women's drinks. Women. I'm tired of ing about women.

For some reason, I can't shake this feeling like I've something wrong. Something that is really wrong; somethi is going to mess up the rest of my life. But I can't seem to out what it is.

This truck's got no radio and I've got 36 more miles to go my first stop at the Big Star in Creedmoore. I see this gu hunting jacket, hitchhiking. It's against company policy, and ly, I don't pick strangers up. But I feel like talking to son So I stop and pick him up. He can't be all bad, if he's a deer h

"I'm a deer hunter myself," I say, as he climbs in, "Last we in fact, I bagged a deer with 14 points on his head."

"How far are you going?" he asks.

"About 30 miles down the highway," I answer, and I try t tinue the deer conversation. "I'm planning on getting the mounted; them antlers are a beauty."

He looked confused, and then he said, "Oh, it's the jacke sorry, I'm not a deer hunter. I got this jacket at the Salvatio my. It was the warmest thing they had. My name's Freddie. W yours?"

"George," I say as I shake his hand.

"George is the name of my favorite Beatle," he informs

"I never was one much for the Beatles. I am more into K Rogers and Dolly Parton." This guy seems kind of weird. Bu not really worried. There's a gun in the glove compartment, i of hijackings.

"Can I ask you a personal question?" he asks me.

"That depends on how personal," I answer and I am sta to doubt my good sense at picking this weirdo up.

"Do you ever feel bad after you kill a deer?" He continues, reason I ask, is that I'm a vegetarian."

"I hate to disappoint you, fellow, but I usually feel great I've shot a deer. Don't you ever get tired of eating vegetab

Freddie laughed, "Actually, I'm not a strict vegetarian. Tech ly, I'm a lacto ova vegan. I also eat fish and lots of fruit."

"What the hell's a lacto ova vegan?" I ask.

"It means that I eat the products of animals; like milk, ch eggs, yogurt, you know what I mean."

"I'm not much of a yogurt eater, myself," I reply.

"That's O.K. Everybody has their own way of life. As Bob D says, "I ain't looking to compete with you, beat or cheat or mis you, simplify, classify you, deny, defy, or crucify you. All I r want to do, is, baby, be friends with you."

s hippie was singing at the top of his lungs. After he started
e second verse, I interrrupted him, "Look, Freddie, the only
'm ever gonna be friends with you, is if you stop singing."
stopped singing and I felt kind of bad, because I didn't want
rt his feelings, so I tried to talk to him.
eddie, what's your line of work?"
ne? Well I guess the closest thing I ever came to having a
n, was being a student at the university. I was a double ma-
usiness and Communications. But, I dropped out," he said.
ow come?" I asked.
ook me three years to realize that everything I was learning
ullshit," he said. "First, they teach you how screwed up the
l is, then they teach you how to get the better of it."
e things his teachers were teaching kind of made sense to me,
aid, "The way I see it, life is a bunch of comparisons; some
e are better off than you and some, you are better off than."
on't you see, that's what they want you to think. You've got-
aught up in their game. This capitalistic bullshit ladder that
one is supposed to feel like they have to climb. The first thing
nacroeconomics class taught me was that nothing is free, that
thing costs money."
can't argue with that," I said.
o quote Dylan again, 'Twenty years of schooling and they put
n the day shift.' It's all bullshit. Where I'm going everything
ee."
ve been meaning to ask you where you were going," I said.
's a place right off the highway, right before you get to Creed-
re. I'm going to visit some friends of mine, who live in a com-
e. At this place, everyone gives equally and takes equally. My
ds prove all my professors wrong. The love is free, the food
warmth are free."
ounds like Communism to me," I said. My head is beginning
rt. I could feel the beginnings of a hangover.
eddie kept on talking, "That's what the big business corporate
idents tell us to call it. That is exactly what the University was
ming me for. The second thing I learned in macroeconomics,
how to figure stock dividend payments for companies like Avon
IBM."
BM?" I asked.
Exactly," he replied. " My Persuasive Speech class taught me
to lie effectively. Their goal was to eventually teach me how
resent myself well enough in an interview, so that I could at-
some kind of managerial position in some corporation
valent to IBM. All for the sake of money. It wasn't my scene."
is was hard for me to believe. "You turned down a job at IBM?"
ked.
Well, not exactly—I suppose I could have gotten a job there,
ad completed school. But, I'm glad I didn't. In a way, it's the
ple who work for IBM who are the losers. They miss out on
he free things in life. In the words of John Lennon, 'They are
nowhere men.' "
uddenly, I really began to relate to this guy.
I see what you mean!" I cried, "but don't you miss having
ney, for things?"
The only material objects I own are the clothes I'm wearing.
yeah, and this—would you like to share some with me?"
e held out a baggie of marijuana, which he had pulled out of
pocket. I hadn't gotten high in a long time. Maybe a little pot
uld make my headache go away.
Well, usually, I don't, but seeing how we just made this discovery
ut big business, I guess that's reason enough to celebrate."
few miles up the road, we stopped at a Little General and
ght a sixpack. I was really high and my headache had completely
gone away. We sat in the cab and drank beers and talked, outside of the Little General.

"I want you to come meet my friends. Man, they will really dig you!" He was saying, "The commune is only two miles off the highway, it won't take long."

I looked down at my watch and I noticed that somehow I was an hour and a half behind schedule already. I said, "Well I'm already behind time—I guess it don't matter if I'm a little more late. Big Star don't usually care, it's my second stop. It's Winn Dixie that gives me hell, if I'm late. But, who is really gonna care, except for some fatcat in a suit?"

The dirt road that we turned down keeps forking off and I've got a paranoid feeling, like we are lost. Freddie says to just keep bearing to the right and we'll get there fine. Somehow, I'm not too sure that he knows what he's talking about. Around here, the networks of gravel roads go on forever.

Finally, we have stopped and asked directions. This farmer is telling Freddie that the sheriff ran off the kids at the commune months ago. They were farming someone else's land. Freddie isn't too worried. All I want to do is to get back to pavement. We are some kind of lost. I have vowed to Freddie that I am going to turn on to the first paved road I see. My watch says that I am three hours behind schedule. This is some kind of craziness that got me off track.

"Don't worry," says Freddie. "We can stop and get directions back to the highway at the first place we come to."

The first place we come to is a truck stop by the name of Bingo's. The brick buildings of a project loom behind the restaurant. At least, we are back in civilization. I park the truck and go in.

We are sitting in a booth next to one where a woman who looks like a prostitute is sitting. The man she is sitting with looks like a pimp.

"It's taking the waitress 15 minutes to wait on us," I complain.

"Don't worry, be happy," is all that Freddie says. He is studying the menu.

I watch the clock and it is 15 more minutes before the waitress comes to see what we want. I ask her directions to Creedmoore and she gives me a series of rights and lefts, with various gestures. I forget them all immediately. Freddie orders an omelet.

The pimp and the prostitue have started to argue, behind us.

I look up at the restaurant clock and see that it is five minutes until eleven. I am almost four hours late with my pepsi-cola deliveries. This one might cost me my job.

Freddie is talking some nonsense about how if pretzels are a complement to beer, that if they raised the price of hops that nobody would buy pretzels.

The prostitute has just thrown a cup of coffee on the pimp, and he is cussing her out. I stand up.

"This was some kind of craziness."

Walking out into the parking lot, I can hear Freddie yelling at me to come drink my coffee.

All I know is that I don't know how I got here. It was some kind of craziness that made me pick that hippie up. Or, maybe it started when I woke up drunk this morning. I've got to get to Creedmoore. I head for my truck, but before I get there something makes me stop short.

The back door to my truck is open. At least half of the cases are gone. Scanning the mudhills surrounding the parking lot, I see two black kids carrying a case of pepsi-cola between them. They are roughly 400 yards in front of me, and are heading for the brick buildings of the project. Now, they have thrown down the case, breaking every bottle, and are running like hell for the project.

If I catch them, I am going to beat the shit out of them.

Elizabeth Smith-Botsc

poems

Roanoke Rapids

What it is to be southern—I am
blue dress in the front porch glider,
blue jays and grass spoking up through sandy plots
between street and houses.
Mill stacks and sweet betsy bushes in the sideyard
and beyond. And no mufflers
jacked-up Mustangs, people talking and harried as anyone else
but slower, every cast-off breath thick like paper factory air
with the chemicals of subsistence.
People work mill to live swing shift, drink Pine State milk
little or no honey but in this neighborhood
where the shotgun almost-row houses vibrate identically
to the same scheduled trains, neighbors grow butterbeans
collards or phlox in their own backyards.
Trashcans and conversation in the dirt
alley the backs of all their houses face. Textiles are big
J.P. Stevens sends fabrics down the tracks.
"Bolts-*and*-bolts-*and*-bolts-*and*-bolts," the sanguine engine
sings, echoing the contents of the cars
that couple and uncouple every night noisily
without passion.
My grandmother wove—the pattern she designed,
tightest most efficient rip-proof percale
is in your sheets. Mine. My blue dress swells in the porch wind
the color of faraway. I am a visitor
will go to this mill breath this south speech
in my lungs my mouth
(those bellows for life's short red
flame)

Notes from the Youngest Sister

Every afternoon is like this, everything reminds me
as I walk through the old neighborhood
now girt with pylons
encroached upon by varnished fingers of the furniture plant,

Someone slams
a screen door, and I see
one of my sisters, a lawyer,
a teenager again
going out to practice her cartwheels
in the green flowered shorts I coveted.
And me at five
grinding over to Mrs. Tesh's in a deluxe trike
despite the fearsome dog that is still barking.

I found a poem I wrote when I was ten

> The closet light, reaching out of the darkness
> Hurts me.
> It's more than pain.

I was afraid of the dark, to sleep by myself.

My three grand sisters taught me the Spanish double l
I flaunted at show and tell
then they moved to Chapel Hill.
My teacher gave me a blank look
embarrassed for me
and I went back to being the strange child
who wore old shoes.
I had a dignity
no one knew.

After Life

When the ocean rolls away in a dust cloud, salt, old bones
when the cloth of the ocean goes
taking weeds and gulls

we'll be bubbles left by the last
receding busy waves
in a space they shovelled out for us
ages ago—some cove,
emptied vessel, relic
of existence,
we'll delight in its nostalgia,
When the water flowed here
and here—
we'll sigh and know, stretched membranes simple
around balls of air,
how life and seashores were
and how secret and closeted angels had danced
before our wands
(our minds our once full
bodies)

Ideas! how the storm floats
when there is no water to curl
underneath,
no mass for that force
to churn thought into action.

Emptied of body, we
carnival glass shore lanterns
will be left to do our bubble dance

in the dark and the light knowing as we will, emulating,
all the long shadows of the blown dry sea.

Task

Start—
all, finish-nothing, no greater
scapes of sea or sky
in me half-wrought
will yield
water, air; those
elements miss
their own rare music,
grounds
of their existence,
in me:
they are embryos
aborted.

Numb fingers poised
above a giant piano, I feel already
my pressure will be futile
against the ancient keys,
each one a different cheek of darkness
to be stroked
cajoled into revelation
not plunked
as I plunk.
Not my laborious
slow scales
interpreting what the perfect
natural silence of morning sings.
I cannot foil
that everything/
nothingness.

Clouds A. Falstrom

Land of Autumn

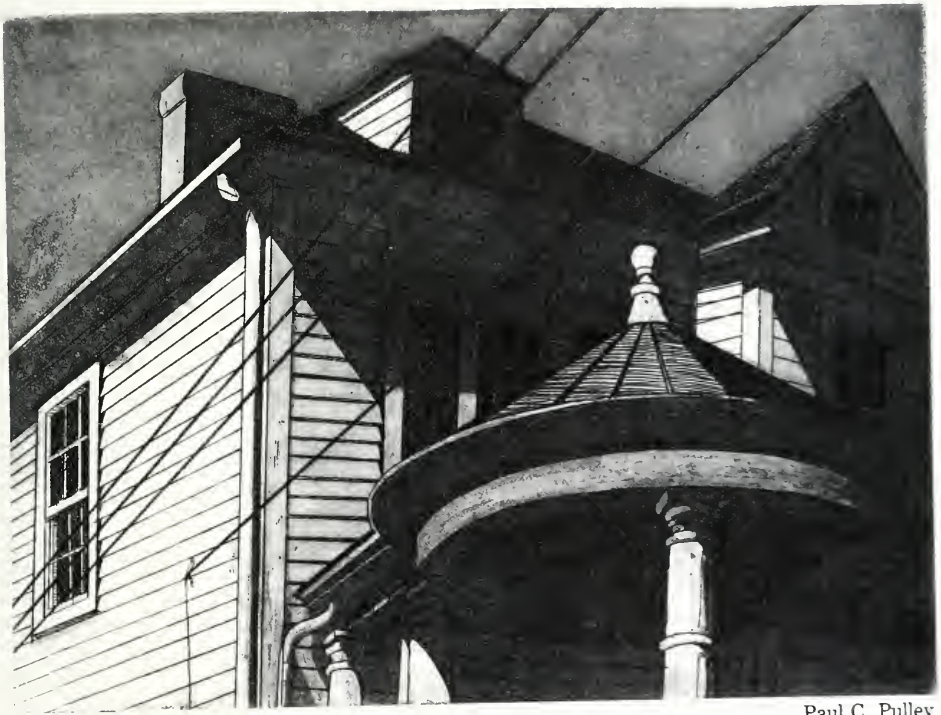
When pines and elms shake the bright air louder
And the dry leaves drip their rain,
When twigs snap off in windy hours
Until only the sheathing wood remains,

When patches of the August sky
Over molten hills of drought
Turn silky before our eyes,
And the wind has swept the songbirds south,

We move to the cold's commands,
Spread blankets, shake out sweaters,
Meekly, as though our hearts and hands
Had caused this chilling weather.

The oblique sun paves trees to gold,
Whose roots break rock, whose leaves submit,
While we mutter of the months of cold
In halting tongues of immigrants.

Salvatore Salerno



Moonlight

Paul C. Pulley

Quaint Illusions
(for M.M.)

Imagine a field of corn torn horizontal by hurricane;
And the rain comes down,
And the cows come home,
Shine on, harvest moon.

Imagine newly budded trees weighted with odd April ice;
And the sun goes down,
An ill wind makes soft things clatter —
    Facinating rhythm,
    Up is down, back is forth —
Stormy weather.

Patti Motsinger

The Hypnotist Responds to an Early Spring
(for V. Kelley)

The spring breeze brought the room
To grace once more, pastel shadows
Unravelling the patchwork of time - she heard
The mischevious giggling under the earth - she saw
Those verdant fingertips steal away the windowglass—
She sipped her tea.
Often amused by Racmaninov,
Her round laughter explains both
Innocent thievery and
The color of green.

Patti Motsinger

Names in a Book

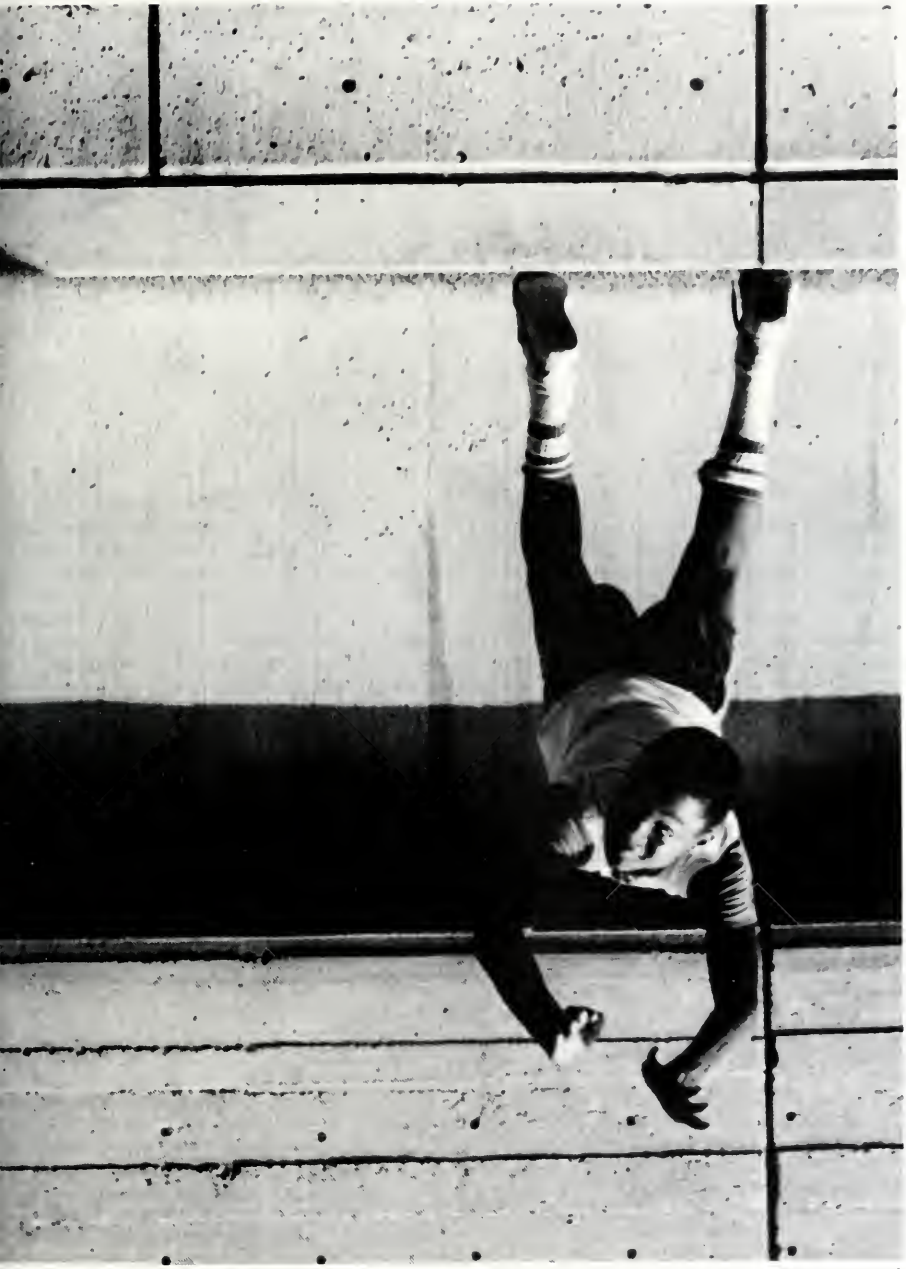
This small green book
nesting in my pocket
is a providence to itself,
an inner Luxembourg of people
chosen from these days.
  Or was I chosen? and how?
That hangs in sunlight's haze;
say that we're related
by moon and blood,
by coupling pain.

Population, fifty souls
as recently as Tuesday,
but I've learned by now
to take those numbers down
in pencil only.

Their lines are always open
and they serve me time like food
only in my dreams, which spill
into my waking days.
Beneath this longer sun,
they shift to incredible stories.

I'll confess to many nights
while I sit and turn those pages,
staring at those special names
as a child would gaze at stars.
I'll murmur by a candle — *friend, friend, friend*
over and over softly
like an invocation.

Salvatore Salerno



Michael Read

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He had been lying there in the darkness for a long time when he heard footsteps on the stairs. They were almost inaudible to begin with, but became louder and louder, the unevenness becoming more and more evident as they climbed. He pulled the bedclothes up over his pajamas and turned his face into the pillow as he had been sleeping, though sleep was an impossibility. The steps came to stop on the other side of his door, then the knob turned with a quiet click and the yellow light from the hall filled his room.

"You're going to hell son," the silhouette in the doorway said in a cold, matter-of-fact tone. "I know you're not asleep ... Lord wouldn't let you sleep after what you did."

Josh peered out from under the covers, eyes slitted, still cringing from the sudden brightness. They had been sore already. His father stood in the doorway leaning against the wall, holding his ribs and wheezing a bit with each breath.

"You're going to hell son - no matter what you do now. You'll burn forever. You know that, don't you?" His voice was a hoarse rasp from all the yelling - but the sadness crept through.

"I didn't mean ..." Josh began.

"You did. I saw it. God saw it - Jesus saw it - and the Ghost saw it too. You can lie to me, but you can't lie to them - nobody can lie to them. They see it all. They saw you take temptation ... temptation from the very ones we were trying to save!" His father continued, anger welling up. "God will see you reap the wages of your sin!"

"I'll never do anything like that again, sir. I didn't mean to do *anything* against God."

"Don't tell me what you meant to do - I know what you *did*. Tell God you didn't mean it when you're burning in hell! Tell Satan, tell him you didn't mean it. You're going to hell son - Bible says everyone who doesn't believe will go there with you. I can't help you if you won't believe!" his father finished. Then he closed the door and the darkness closed back in on Josh as the footsteps came from the rickety stairs again.

Josh watched the light that came underneath the door as the s faded, just a hint of the brightness on the other side that hur eyes. Like the light of God his father saw but always seeme fade before he could see it. He was going to hell - even his fa knew it now. But he didn't want to go to hell - he wanted t by Jesus' side forever like his father and the men in the Bi

He lay there in the darkness listening to his breathing, fin he had no more sheep left in his head to count. He lay there the weight of his sins pressing the air from his chest. He felt s He curled up tightly into a ball and pulled the covers over his h to shut out the world, trying to hear what he never had been to hear.

Let me believe - let me believe - let me believe ...

He thought of hell - then thought of worse that he couldn't anyone about. Josh wanted to believe but God just didn't seem want him to. He sat up each night praying and went to church ev Sunday and Wednesday and listened to all the yelling from the p ple who really knew God but it didn't help. He sat there now his bed feeling guilty and sinful. He was going to hell, his fat said. *I'm not afraid of hell*, he thought, then cried some more. J knew his father was right, he was a sinner - or maybe even a fri of Satan because he wasn't afraid of hell - of burning. At least th he would be somebody.

A light came through the window - moving across the wall o his head. A car in the driveway. He tried to see who it was, he was too late. They were out of sight beside the house. An was all quiet downstairs - no clue as to who the visitor might Maybe it was his mother and his father might come back to way he was before she left. Maybe she could show him ...

Downstairs, he heard the door open and close. Then there we voices, but he couldn't make them out. In the distance he hea sirens. He wondered for a moment if it might be the warning sire his father had shown him a long time ago; the ones that warn of big fires, tornadoes, or nuclear missiles. Maybe there we

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les coming right now to hit their house. Maybe in the morn-here would be nothing left of him, the house, or his father. ondered if Bible hell could mean bombs and the flames and afterwards ...

h was scared there in his bed, not of his father or the man was downstairs with him, but of nothing. He pulled the covers more tightly around him and stared at the light under the . Downstairs, he heard the voices more clearly now. They ded familiar. They were the same ones he had heard when it arted in the driveway.

s father had been arguing with the man in the driveway for g time while Josh listened. "I'm getting out of it," the other said. "Its getting too big - too much - too many people trying ke over everything around them. It wasn't meant to be that ."

You used to know it was," Josh's father replied, his voice rais-"You used to have faith."

here was a long pause while Josh turned pages without reading words in front of him. Then he heard the other man's car pull y from the front of the house and drive away. He wondered it was, but he wouldn't ask. Prying was impolite.

Josh, could you give me some help?" His father called from nstairs. He stopped his reading and put the Bible on his bed- table as he ran to the window.

Be down in a second, sir."

e walked down the stairs instead of running because they hadn't n repaired yet and squeaked like they might fall in at any mo-nt. The paint on the railing was cracked and peeling, so he kept hand off it for fear of getting scraped. Maybe one day his father uld spend one of his weekends off working on the house. He ran ough the kitchen to the garage door, dodging the drying posters t were spread out on the floor so they could be put up the next morning. In the garage, he saw why his father had needed his help. The big signs up against the wall that the other man had been helping him with were about to fall down on him.

"Josh, grab this sign and pull it out while I hold up the stack. If I do it they'll be all over the floor."

"Which one?" Josh asked from his father's side. He looked at the mass of what must have been thirty signs mounted on long poles so they could be held above the crowd. He'd seen most of them - but until recently his father hadn't let him come along, so some were still a mystery.

"The big red one, with the fire on it - right there."

Josh reached in and grabbed the pole his father had indicated. The pile teetered precipitously for a moment and his father had to push hard to keep it from falling. But once he had it under control the sign he had wanted was in the middle of the floor for him. Ready for tonight.

"Thanks, son," his father said, ruffling Josh's hair. "Have you finished your reading for today yet?"

"Almost."

"Good. The Bible will get you to heaven if you'll let it. Remember that, son."

"Yes sir."

"Are you coming to the concert with me tonight?"

"What concert, sir?"

"That *Prince* guy - down at the Coliseum. Don't you want to come?"

"Yes sir," Josh replied, trying to hide the quaver in his voice. The guys in his fifth grade class had been talking about that concert for weeks and he knew they'd all be there for it. And if someone saw him, he'd be in for hell at school. Maybe he could hide in the car or get sick before it all started.

"You sure you want to go, son? The place will be crawling with *them*."

"Yes sir, I want to go and help you. It's important work."

"Good, son. Now you go up and finish your reading and I'll call you when I have dinner finished."

His father was angry all the way to the Coliseum. They were late. "I had to wait for two hippies getting a permit for some concert down in the park next weekend before they'd give me one to spread God's word." He said, speeding to get their on time. "But I got the time so I can go there and preach at the sinners with their drinking and music and pot and perversion."

In front of the Coliseum, they got hung up in traffic behind two Trans-Ams and a black van with red flames painted on its sides and a DEADHEADS DO IT BETTER bumper sticker. Josh's father saw the flames when the van turned and said "At least *he* knows where he's going!" as they followed it into the parking lot. They passed by a crowd of people crunched up in front of the main doors on their way in, but his father had to drive all the way to the other end of the parking lot to find a space. Once there, he pulled out the sign, assembled it, and towed Josh behind him as he rushed across the lot trying to keep the wind from pulling him off balance while Josh tried to hold on the the leaflets his father had trusted him to carry.

"You are all going to hell!" His father yelled as he raised his sign above the shifting crowd that was waiting at the coliseum entrance. Josh watched as heads turned their way - angry expressions, taunting, hostile laughter - same as always. They stared at his father and occassionally glanced at him in puzzlement. His father stood in the middle of them holding up the sign as high as he could to show them the picture of Jesus in front of flames and the big, red words "All Who Do Not Believe Will Burn!!!"

"Every single one of you will burn in hell! And this is how you'll get there!" He motioned to them and the Coliseum building behind them with a broad sweep of his arm. "You will all go to hell for your sins!"

"Why don't you just shut up and get outta here!?" Someone yelled from behind Josh in the crowd.

"What's the matter? Scared of the truth?" His father yelled back, turning. "The truth will set you free! Your truth is that you're going to hell for what you're doing!"

A bearded young man in a purple sweatshirt came out of the crowd at Josh's father and rushed him before one of the Coliseum security guards stopped him.

"My truth is I'm going to lay that fuckin' sign upside your head if you don't shut up," the man yelled. Josh's father had told him about men with beards. Sinners and hippies like those who had taken his mother away to Satan's way. Jesus had nothing to do with bearded men - only sinners did.

"Why don't you move on outta here?" a security guard said to his father after the bearded man disappearred into the crowd. "I don't want anything happening to you or your kid."

"Even the heathens of this city must grant me the right to proclaim the Word to the fallen," Josh's father yelled at the guard - who halted his advance when the permit to demonstrate they had gotten uptown was presented. "God made this nation and this world; and even though Satan has taken it over the Word cannot be silenced!"

"He's got a permit," the guard said to the audience with a shrug of apology as he moved back to the perimeter. Josh sat down on the pavement, tired, and watched his father work to convert the crowd back to the way of truth.

"You will all go to hell for you sins! Your church cannot save you - your ministers cannot save you - not even the money you throw into the offering plate on Sunday can save you! ONLY JESUS!!!" He pushed the sign higher. "ONLY JESUS can save your so

"I suppose *you* are saved? *You* never did *anything* wrong? meone yelled from too far back to see.

"Yeah!" Screamed a girl in front of the group. "Tell us *y* perfect!"

"I ..." Josh's father thrust the sign at the girl with such she jumped back into the two men behind her in panic. "... the glory of God with me because *I* spread that which is truel word - REPENT OR BURN IN HELL FOREVER! I am perfect, but God has forgiven my sins and he will not forgive yo

"I thought he forgave everyone's sins, not just loudmouths you. Do you think you can yell your way into heaven?" This it was an older man who had moved to the front of the crowd. crowd inched forward, smelling weakness. Josh was scared

"You are the helpers of Satan!" Josh heard his father yell at the crowd. Josh felt funny - his ears were ringing. Then he the thin face of someone he recognized in the crowd. It was R Kinton, one of his classmates, and more importantly, one of few friends he had managed to make at his new school. "...and will burn because you help spread the word of Satan to those are too young and innocent to recognize its evil. The music listen to .. the television you watch ... they are tools of the d YOU ARE HERE TONIGHT TO WORSHIP HIM!" Josh trie back up so he couldn't be seen, but it was too late - Rusty had s ted him and was smiling at him.

"It's only MUSIC, geek!" said someone else.

"Yeah, it never hurt anyone!"

"Go to hell yourself!"

The crowd was getting angrier and angrier, but Josh was m ly concerned with not letting Rusty know the man they were attacking his father. When his father's back was turned, J looked over at Rusty with a fake grin and spiraled his finger aro his ear.

"Yeah," Rusty mouthed back. "CRAZY."

At that instant, Josh's father turned like a cornered animal faced Rusty - who kept that same smartassed grin stretched acr his lips. Amid the jeers of the crowd, he singled out the boy, p bably because he was the youngest person in view besides Jo

"Look at you!" His father yelled at Rusty. "Don't you see they taking from you the most important thing of all - YOUR SOUL

"No they're not, jerk!" Rusty yelled back.

"Yeah, jerk," said another bearded man with a beer can in hand and more in his voice. "Only one taking anything from anyo here is you. And you've never had anything taken from you becau nobody wants anything you've got!"

Josh looked back just in time to see the sign lower and towards the bearded man standing right behind Rusty.

Josh yelled "No dad! NO!!!" but it was already too late. The p of the sign caught the bearded man's arm, sending him reeling ba into the crowd with the force of the blow. Josh's father had swu in haste and was not ready for the blow to land - so it knocked hi off-balance as well. He fell forward, following the pole, droppi the heavy metal rod onto Rusty's shoulder and knocking him the ground as well.

They all three laid there for a stunned moment before the secu ty guard grabbed Josh's father by the shirt collar and hoisted hi off the ground.

"You're under arrest for ..." the guard started before Josh father tried to jump free and planted an elbow in his ribs. His fath started to run, but the guard jerked his nightstick from his be and brought it hard into the fleeing prisoner's stomach. He fell a the guard pushed him down hard into the pavement as he snapp the handcuffs behind his back. Josh's father glared at the beard

who was picking himself up and wiping the blood from his
ed brow.
re lost more than any of you - Satan took my wife and all you
d him. They may take me away, but I'll ..." he gasped as the
l pulled him to his feet to take him to a waiting police car that
noved in during the screaming and confusion. "I'll be back
will save you with the word of God. If I don't you'll go to
ike her!"
other guard grasped Josh's shoulder.
ou better go with your father. He is your father, isn't he?"
guard said. Josh nodded. The guard took him to the car and
im in next to his father. Josh watched Rusty and the bearded
get into another police car, which pulled out in front of them
ey left the parking lot with the sirens and lights going.
on't worry, son," his father said, bent over by the pain in his
out unable to reach them for the handcuffs. "We'll be okay.
had a reason for this - just believe that."

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ey put Josh in a waiting area near the lounge in the downtown
e station and left one officer with him to be sure he was okay.
offered him a book, but it wasn't the right one so he declined
out explaining.
Where's my father?" Josh asked the officer.
e's being charged right now, but with you out here the judge'll
ably let him out on bail so he can take you home before they
him up. You probably be home within an hour."
ut we have to get back to the concert ..."
Ie won't be going to another concert for a long time. Your
er assaulted a police officer and attacked two people. They're
there right now. What he did is very bad."
But he doesn't do anything bad."
Why not - everyone does something bad once-in-a-while."
Ie believes. He's going to heaven. Bad things are sins."
Did he tell you that?"
Yes sir. He said if I did bad things I was a sinner and would
in hell. And he said if I didn't ..."
sh stopped dead as Rusty was brought into the room by another
er and set down in a chair across from him.
Your parents are on the way. They'll be here in a few minutes,
ait here," the officer said. Rusty was still holding a bag of ice
is shoulder though he didn't look like he hurt too bad.
Josh?" Rusty said, cutting the officer off. "What are you doin'
e? Did he hit you too? I have to file a charge when my mom
dad get here."
sh just stared back, not ready to answer.
Did he hit you?" Rusty repeated. "I hope they put him away.
at's wrong with you, Josh?"
Just leave him alone, okay?" The officer sitting beside Josh said.
e's waiting for his father to come out of there."
That NUT?" Rusty said, walking over to Josh. "That fruitcake
our dad? No wonder you didn't bring him to parents' night!
y'd he hit me?"
He just got mad - I guess."
He's a NUT - you heard that crap. You don't believe that stuff,
you?"
osh pictured kids yelling "Josh is a nut - Josh is a fruitcake"
managed through strained lips "No, no ... I don't believe that
ff. But some of its good - some of the stuff he says."
You're nuts. That was crap! Every bit. He said *music* would
d you to hell ... Prince would send you to hell. That's crazy!"
Why don't you leave him alone? He's not bothering you," the
icer said.
Rusty gave Josh a cruel, knowing grin. "I'm going to tell everyone
you believe that stuff. Rusty raised his arms, imitating the way
Josh's father had yelled at the crowd. "Concerts and music will
send you *all* to hell!!!"

"I don't believe it ... I don't!" Josh yelled back, coming to his feet in fear. Then he watched as Rusty's eyes looked past him at something behind his seat.

"Let's go, son," a voice said from behind him. Before he turned, he knew it was his father. "Let's go. We need to get home."

For a moment, Josh saw a strange look cross his father's face - in his eyes - then it passed and was gone. He'd seen the look only once before, and it didn't make him scared or worried - just sick with guilt for what he'd said.

"I didn't mean ..." Josh began.

"Let's go, son," his father repeated. "We've got to get home." He took Josh gently by the hand and led him outside to the police car that was waiting to drive them home. He didn't say a word to Josh the whole, long ride home.

Josh heard a sound at the bottom of the stairs leading up. He almost expected two sets of feet to come up, but the was only one and they did not belong to his father. They came up the stairs quickly and stopped outside his door. Josh didn't even bother to feign sleep when the door slid quietly open.

"Josh?" said a quiet voice he'd heard before but couldn't place. It was the man from the driveway that morning.

"Yes."

"My name is Peter Bristol. I work with your father; or, I did, and he's asked me to watch you while he's away. Are you okay?"

"Yes."

"Your father still loves you, no matter how it seems now. I want you to know that. My wife's trying to reach your mother so she can come and get you tommorrow. I'll stay with you until then."

"Are you a preacher?" Josh asked, not trusting his memory.

"I used to be."

"Then tell me how to believe."

"Everyone has to learn to believe in their own way. I can't teach you - it's something you feel in your heart. Don't you believe in Jesus?"

"I don't know ... I want to."

"Don't you believe in heaven. You don't want to go to hell, do you?"

"No."

"Then just find it in yourself - let God in."

"Just let me believe in heaven or hell - I don't care which!"

"I won't tell your father you said that or he'll just get angry again. Didn't you say you wanted to believe?"

"Yes."

"Then pray and your prayers will be answered."

The man walked out of Josh's room and down the stairs, letting the door close behind him with a smack. Josh lay there an listened and listened, but all he could hear was the sound of distant sirens. Then the light on the stairs went out and his room went completely dark.

I wonder if this is how it will be, he thought. Darkness, no sound, alone forever ... or just not there anymore.

He wondered if dead was like sleep without any dreams or if once he died he'd never wake up or think again or just not be a person anymore. In the dark, he could see just the little lights of the stars outside through his window. In the dark, he stared up at the stars that proved his existance and tried to think of something else.

Let me believe ... let me believe ... let me believe ...

Note from The Silver Star

I.
Last night waited
by the hard rails
with a blonde-headed girl
bare feet
and guitar

full moon
over a field of milkweed
blowing

when the train horn blasted
wider than light
honey leaked from the stone

II.
This morning
we lean
on each other inside
the steel yoke
passing fields of used tires
somewhere
in Hamlet,
NC

hardly any
early morning light
in the city
pollution
angels
the groggy
orange eye of dawn
workers float
like paper shadows
under the red brick
gunbarrel
smokestack

and everything
turns
bloody
maroon

John Pfaff

The Silver Star is a train running north to south along the east coast of the US.

Stones A. Falstrom

Grand Prize

Jane Ann Kepley

Catherine Richardson

poems

Fetal Movement

Your frail hand sweeps against the curtain of light
As you bob and float in a signless ocean.
I cannot yet enter your circle of night.

Anchored to me gently by that length of life
As a fish on a stringer in a currentless ocean,
Your frail hand sweeps against the curtain of light.

Day by day, you mark the tide, the tide of time
A solitary island in the midst of an ocean.
I cannot yet enter your circle of night.

Muffled from true existence, true life
Listening sightless to the ache and flow of motion
Your frail hand sweeps against the curtain of light.

You perform the ritual of being alive
By moving, and growing with every motion.
I cannot yet enter your circle of night.

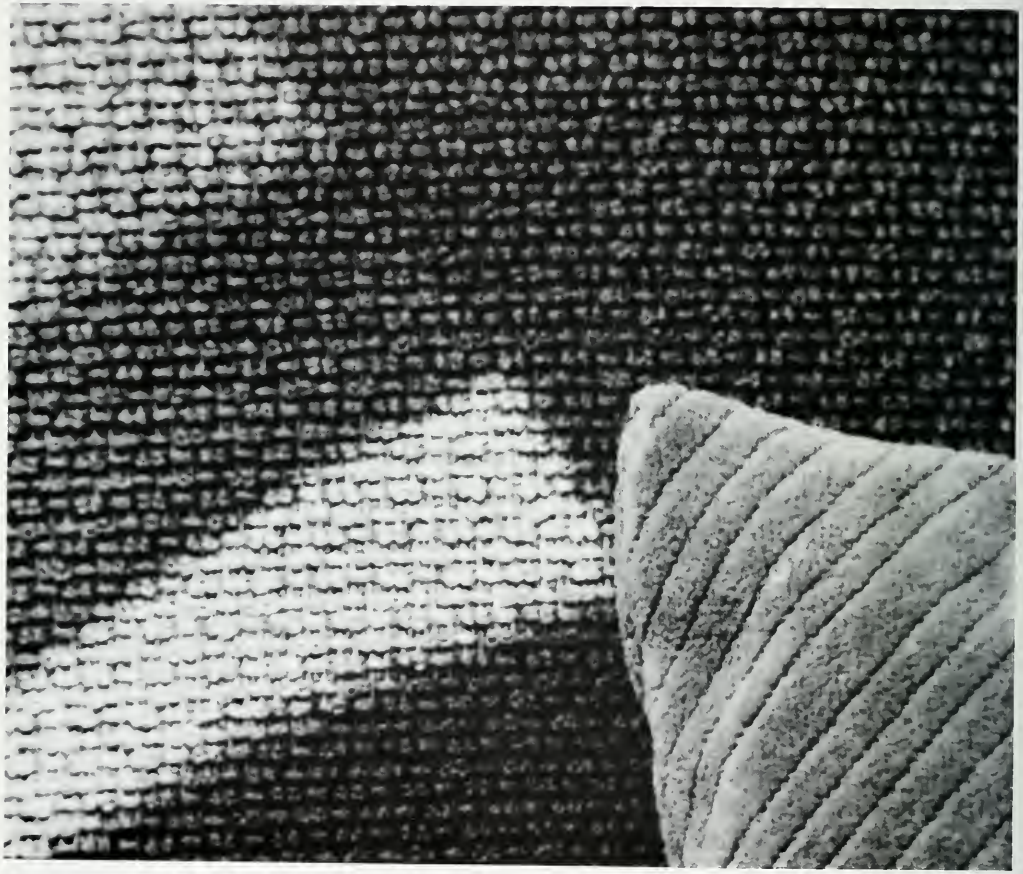
Caught like a moth, fluttering deep inside
Do you touch me because you like the motion?
Your frail hand sweeps against the curtain of light.
But I cannot penetrate your circle of night.

Eleven Months

Fuzz to suck and finger and carry
Mummy tastes like Mummy tastes like
To get over and stand
To stand when leaning
I feel her leg, a leg heavy
Moving away
My Mummy tastes like
Fuzz to chew and spit
Moving away and back again
Mummy tastes like Mummy tastes like
Sleep without sound without light
Leaning over I am leaning upwards
Here I want, but no taste of
Mummy tastes like sleep
Without sleep she tastes like sleep

Sitting Nude

John Marshall



Kathy D'Angelo

Fear in a Handful of Floor

One night with bandaged eyes
I fell in love with my hardwood floors.
I sat counting the cracks,
felt the uneven coats of varnish
as I mapped my way to soft places.

Perched in my temporary ether,
a wounded patched-up guru,
I preach acceptance to my eyes —
which only nod in pain
at shadows of promised hope.

I glide a spread eagle over the hardwood.
Arm-wings and toe-talons outstretch
to catch the updraft-tremors
of a train passing nearby, a hurricane
in the blind world of floor-flying.

Faint odors of a perfume spill,
roach spray, the tracks of a wet dog
and old shoes crawl through the sealant,
prisoners of hard-to-escape-wood.
(It's like I've found a handful of forever.)

Memories of sight squeeze between
the bars of sterile gauze cells,
just minutes away from being sealed
into flooring of eyes like the ghost
of a wet dog doomed to the woodwork.

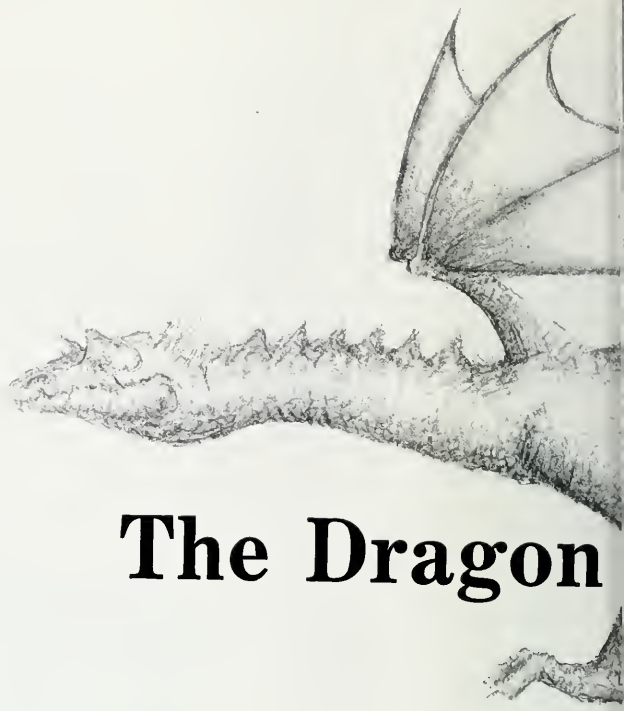
Byron Emerson

Strange Pythagoras

Although it's not yet six o'clock
This prison of my flesh has barred me
The breeze of latest afternoon, and blocked the light
From newly risen, scintillating seas.
True, I have thought for days on end
Of Western faith, and saints, though damning him,
Confirm that strange Pythagoras, whose mysteries
Were all a means of throwing off the cold,
Hard shackles of his clumsy limbs.
Yet what if this geometer had seen
Some fleeting figure in the thickest jungle depths,
Whose long legs sprang and flexed and, glistening,
They took the dark torso on
Still deeper into verdant glades, untouched
By benedictions of the laughter-loathing men
Who came later, the sun to their unbending backs?
Of what if that strange Greek had seen
A woman of the Orient, unclad,
Who swayed and lithely pressed the bosom of her youth
To marble floors, enrapturing her king?
Would then this prison of my flesh,
This clay dungeon of my Greco-Roman limbs
Entomb me till, at six o'clock, the latest light
Had flashed its last on calm, on windless seas?

David Herman

Lawrence Sexton



The Dragon

Ia

Guinevere walked to the donjon's parapet and looked out across the forked river that protected the castle on three sides, surveying the highroad that ran parallel with the eastern tributary's opposite bank. I watched her from the shadow of the uppermost turret, entranced by the play of her buttocks beneath her fine silk gown. Something must have alerted her to my presence for she turned and regarded me with delightfully large azure eyes. Normally, I prefer my women dark and sultry and find blue-blonds insipid, though in truth I must admit I'm willing to top any female with a good, trim figure and a reasonably clear complexion. But there was nothing insipid about my queen. She was one of the two most beautiful women I've ever seen.

Her gaze met mine and she smiled an unsuprised and utterly lovely smile that suffered not a whit for being ever so slightly lop-sided. "Hello, Mordred," she said, "come watch. Sir Lancelot is setting off to slay the dragon of Castle Dore. We must pray for his easy victory."

In truth, I'd rather lance a boil on my own backside than wish that perfumed frog good hunting, but the rules of chivalry and commonsense demanded that her whim be my command, so I got the knee-bending over with as quickly as I could. It's a bloody nuis pretending to be a Christian.

"Where is His Majesty this fine afternoon?" Far away, I h

"Busy with affairs of state," she sighed. 'Will you sit besi on the crenel and keep me company for a time?"

I bowed. "You honor me, My Lady." The gallantry was not pletely feigned. Although I knew well enough what a flightly tart my queen could be, I could never keep myself from fav over her like the worst sort of mincing courtier. Ach, but it's a thing comparatively few women have the gift of making an twit out of every man they meet. In my right mind I'd bug bishop before I'd play the moonstruck cavalier.

"I'm so worried," she continued.

I sat. The worn stone was pleasantly cool. "About Lance

"Yes. Oh, I know you don't like him." I started to protest she cut me off. "No, don't pretend that you do. I'm not as d as all that. Poor man, it must be hard for him, serving at a where he is so despised."

I tried to look hurt and innocent. "Pardon me, My Lady, don't quite know what you mean."

Problem

well

on't put on a mask, Mordred. I'm well aware of most of the ts' feelings toward Lancelot. The only one who can stand him ır little Percival. But I'm not blaming you for it. He's not an man to like."

ıt he wasn't. The Frenchman had been in Arthur's service for st a year, and in that time he'd managed to alienate well-nigh ıtire court. Oh, he was a damned effecient warrior who would proved invaluable back in the days of the Saxon Revolts and ege of Badon Hill, but in times of peace such as these he was lic pain in the arse.

here he goes," said Guinevere. He and his squire were riding rom under the tollhouse and crossing the bridge that spanned ıain branch of the river and connected with the highroad on ther side. It was a hot, dry summer day and once he reached track a cloud of dust rose up like smoke around the feet of ne Gascon stallion. I hoped it would quickly begrime his glin- hauberk, for he'd gone to ridiculous extravagance of having shed in silver. Such bright mail was purely for show. When eached the dragon's territory he'd exchange it for plain oeson and a surcoat of amiantus, the seemingly miraculous c invented by Merlin, who claimed that it was merely a refinement of the Greek *ambeston*, or incombustible flax. That, along with an amiantus-covered shield and similar protection for his horse, would serve him better than the heavy armor when it came to protection from the dragon's flame.

Guinevere turned and looked into my eyes. "Mordred," she said softly, "you are a very clever young man. Don't you think that this questing after dragons is a dangerous folly and a waste of good horses and better men? If the monsters were any more numerous, they'd have emptied Camelot of knights by now."

I nodded. "Yes, My Lady, I do. For myself, I've always been partial to more indoor recreations." My bold flirtatiousness was without serious intent, for despite my conscienceless libido I would not dream of cuckolding my dear father. Some games aren't worth the candle.

"Of course," she continued, "you're far too sensible for such things. But I thought you might be able to find a solution to the problem."

"Me?" I sputtered, very much surprised.

"Yes. A good ruler utilizes the kingdom's resources. My husband is neither the best fighter not the best thinker in the land, but he

does not need to be with Lancelot and Merlin in his service. I am not clever, Mordred, but I see before me a man who is."

"Merlin is far cleverer than I."

"I said cleverness, not wisdom. They are not the same. Besides, Merlin is too besotted with that young girl of his to be much use to anyone these days. Will you help me, Mordred?"

My self-possession had returned. "Of course, My Lady. What would you have me do?"

She stood up. "I do not know. The dragons are a menace to the realm, for they burn crops and devour sheep and peasants. But they are not worth the risking of our best knights. There must be a better way."

Time to toady and make insincere promises. "If there is, My Lady, I swear that I will find it."

"I hope that you shall, Good Knight, for it would please me greatly." With that she turned on her heel and strode gracefully for the entrance to the upper landing. I lingered in the sunlight, musing on the follies of the courtly life.

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The outer bailey was an entire village in miniature. Gap-toothed children, naked but for several layers of dirt, played in the hay and mud while pigs and dogs foraged in the rubbish and hens and geese ran clucking and honking underfoot. Smoke poured from the tall chimneys of the cookhouse and the great oven and hung low in the fumid air, which rang with the sounds of the forge and smithy and echoed with shrill cries from the nearby hawkery. Chattering women, some scantily clad and a bold few naked to the waist, gossiped and cackled as they filled their pots at the little fountain that bubbled up behind the chapel. Every change in the direction of the breeze alternated the smells of the carcasses turning in the fireplaces with those of horses champing in the stable. Here were all the sights and sounds and odors of a thriving manor.

Roundly cursing the fat, one-eyed porter for being slow to open the great iron-faced gates, I crossed over a green scummed moat where a dozen or so varlets splashed merrily about in pursuit of leaping frogs. Before me were the lists, a dusty expanse of open ground bounded on the landward side by the pallisade that ran between the forking waters. To my left, three young sergeants were breaking a balky stallion. Beyond the barbican gate the gardens and orchard were in bloom, but my attention was fixed on the activity taking place between me and that stone and timber outwork.

A stocky knight in a gambeson and padded leather cap was forcing his amiantus-masked destrier to charge a fire-belching contraption that had come to be known as the Mock Dragon. It was actually nothing more than a large brick furnace with a horizontal vent from which issued short jets of flame whenever a pair of sweating pages pumped a great bellows. These blasts were timed so that the flames played for a brief moment down the length of the horse's protected muzzle as it reached the end of its charge. Beside the furnace stood a raised pole on which were impaled at least a score of rotting dragon heads, placed there so that the steed would be accustomed to the musty, brimstone-like odor of the intended foe. Flies buzzed in a dark cloud around the shriveled eyes and swarmed in and out of the open, saw-toothed mouths.

The knight wheeled his mount around for another run and I recognized Gawain. "Brother," I said, "surely this madness hasn't infected you as well?"

"Madness is it?" he barked. "Is it madness that Lancelot has slain five dragons since Roodmas? Six, if he succeeds at Castle Dore. Madness, hell, I'll not be bettered by a stinking frog!"

I shouldn't have distracted him. It takes great skill to make a balking horse, blinded by what's essentially a large bag tied o head, charge into heat and flames and the smell of dragon. Ga chestnut gelding suddenly reared skyward, pawing at the with its broad hooves and neighing like a banshee. My half-b was pitched from the saddle, to land with a dull thud upon tl hard-packed ground. The pages managed to restrain the sn bucking destrier. I ran to Gawain. He was sitting up and co in a cloud of yellow dust.

I bent at his side, "Are you all right?"

"No, I don't think I am." He clutched his ankle and gr "Dammit, Mordred, get away! This is all your bloody fault.' followed a stream of invective, of which "whoreson" w mildest term.

His shinbone had broken cleanly. I made the pages bring a and bear him to the great hall, there to await the ministrati a chirurgeon. He cursed me at length, though with little e inventiveness, but I was used to that. Gawain was not kn having a civil tongue.

The incident disturbed me. Oh, I was glad of the injury, would keep him out of trouble for a time. But that was the Gawain was a good horseman, but far from the best. And on best survived forays after dragons. Despite his gruffness an tongue, I had some love for my bearish brother. This busines getting out of hand.

I lay awake in my chamber that night thinking about it. E Arthur's time, dragons had been comparatively rare in Brita at least, so I'd been told. Then, not long after Uther Pendra death, more and more of the creatures migrated to these isl driven from the Northlands by a succession of hard winte first they only scorched crops as they hunted rats and othe min, for during the first decade of their existence dragons a bigger than cats or smallish dogs. It is only in this stage of development that they can fly. When the beasts mature their do not keep pace with their bodies' growth and are event disproportionately small and therefore useless.

In time, however, dragons are large enough to kill men, and do so readily. Only Arthur's knights can hunt them, for M either will not or can not make amiantus available throughou kingdom. Attempts at utilizing for the same purpose the fireproof mucus that lines a dragon's mouth and throat prod a goo that stank so badly that few could bear to wear it. Al was very difficult to store. No preservatives seemed to work within days it either would dry to a crusty mass or putrefy yeasty slime, neither substance retaining any of the mucus' fo incombustibility. Besides, freshly killed dragons are in rather s supply.

Amiantus aside, only a skilled lancer stood much chance o ing able to drive his weapon deep into a dragon's armored b Neither quarrels nor arrows are powerful enough to penetrate scaly carapace. That required the full force of two-hundred po of man astride a half-ton of charging horse.

Or did it? There is something more powerful that lance or q rel, and that is a javelin hurled by a siege machine. A ballista toss a five pound dart some five-hundred yards with such force upon impact it will embed itself in stone. That was part of answer, but such engines are large and clumsy and require operation of many hands. What is needed is neither a cross nor a catapult but something in between.

Of course. Such a device would make amiantus unnecesary, it could be employed at such a distance as to be beyond the re of a dragon's flame. Indeed, it would make a knight unnecess The building and operating of siege craft is a skill of the baseb unsuited for noble hands. Serfs and yeomen and footsoldiers r

lts. If they have the skill why haven't the bloody peasants
nt of this idea? No wonder they are the lower classes.
olution had presented itself: arm the countryside. After all,
dragons really a peasant's problem? Normally they eat cot-
and charcoal burners and lone travelers. Their greatest
to the aristocracy is in devouring precious sheep and cattle
en more precious laborers. Shepherds and lowborn huntsmen
l the livestock from wolves, why cannot such rustics take
r precautions against dragons, and save knights from hav-
sully their hands in such fashion?

***

was slightly his superior in social standing, Sir Owen himself
down to usher me through his bailey and into his great hall.
, beneath the smoke-blackened timbers, I was led to a hack-
d chipped oaken table and plied with cheese and wine and
t of cold mutton. Owen ap Rhys then stood and looked out
ow casement at his meager orchard, allowing me to eat un-
bed by talk. A hard ride leaves one famished.
was a tall, stoop-shouldered man with a beaky nose and a great
ustache. Finally, after a polite interval, he spoke.
hat brings you to Dyffed, Sir Mordred? It is quite some
ce from Camelot."
elched. "Aye, but worth the journey. I've heard you have a
n in these parts."
walked to the table, sat down heavily, and took a long swallow
ne. "Indeed. But you are not the knight I would have
ted."
ssed my gnawed bone to a scruffy brown dog with a torn ear.
ht immediately broke out between it and several of its mangy
ren, and servants had to drive them from the room. Leaning
I propped my feet up on the table and relaxed in the comfor-
torpor of a freshly filled belly. "Ah, you'd hoped for the famous
ancelot, then? He seldom ranges this far from the court where
so well loved."
shrugged. "It matters not. What do you intend to do? Will
ight the monster?"
ardly. I have a better plan. I will train one of your serfs to
your dragon."
coughed out a sputtering mouthful of his drink. "A *serf*? You
train a *serf* to do this thing? Are you mad?" Then he
embered his manners. "Forgive me, Sir Mordred, but I am
ewhat bewildered. Tell me more of your intentions."
am quite serious. Give me one of your serfs for a week and
l teach him to kill dragons. Surely you would like to *own* a
on slayer. No longer would you have to petition Camelot for
Quite an advantage in these wild parts."
plucked a louse from his mustache and looked thoughtful.
e, I would, and that's the truth of it. But how can a mere bond-
n learn the skills of dragon fighting? Few of them can proper-
t a horse, much less use a lance and shield."
cratched my knee where it itched beneath my woolen breeches.
ave my own methods, Sir Owen, with which I'm still experimen-
. I need a young man, strong and clever, preferably skilled in
mechanical arts, and I need a guide with some knowledge of
countryside who can lead me to where the dragon lairs."
r Owen nodded. "I believe I have one man who fits your needs."
clapped his hands for a steward. "Fetch Sion, the carpenter's
." The steward bowed and hurried from the room. "Sion was
renticed to the carpenter after he was orphaned, but his father
a shepherd and he knows these hills as well as any."
ion was not long in being fetched, for Sir Owen's fief was rather small. Presently, he stood before us, a straw-headed, broad-shouldered young lout with a nose like a turnip. He was dressed in stinking sheepskin mantle and his feet and lower legs were bound in rags. Where his skin showed through it was dark and pocked and leathery. Not a very promising looking churl, but he would have to do.

"Sion," said Sir Owen, "this man is Sir Mordred mac Lot, son of the King of Orkney and nephew to the High King Arthur." Well, that was almost right, for few knew my real parentage. "I am giving you into his service for as long as he may desire. He is a very noble lord and you must obey him in all his wishes. If you do not, he will draw his great sword and smite your foolish head from your shoulders before you draw another breath. If you run away from him I will see to it that you are hunted down and hanged. Do you understand?"

Sion placidly bowed his head. "Aye, M'Lord."

Sir Owen rose. "Good, that's settled then." He looked out the window. "It's not yet noon, Sir Mordred. Do you plan to press on today, or will you require lodging for the night?" He looked relieved when I said that I would not. I gathered that his larder wasn't very full.

When the formalities were over, I departed for the bailey. There, grooms had prepared my horses. My mount was a trim, white destrier, half Gascon and half Arabian. There were also a palfrey and a strong mule for my baggage. I'd originally brought a squire, but he'd taken ill on the road and I'd left him behind at Bath. Sion got up behind me, somewhat unsteady in the saddle, and so we rode out the postern, past the withered orchard and over an ancient bridge where the timbers groaned like old women in their sleep. Across the shallow river I could see checkered fields and thatched cottages and serfs laboring in the cold sunlight, bent and gnarled by daily toil under the iron sky. It seemed as if summer never penetrated very far into this harsh land.

We passed a crumbling churchyard and then a crossroads where a felon dangled from a gibbet, grinning liplessly at his lord's justice. Before us lay high heath and barer hills beyond, all rocks and wind and shadow. Sheep watched us from tall crags and brown shepherds leaned on their crooked staves and whistled to their wild-eyed dogs. The road became a track and then a path and then was lost in the purple heather. Those blooms gave some color to the slopes, but even without them it was not an unpleasant desolation.

We made camp in a deep, roughly circular vale, like a dish, lidded over by low-hanging clouds. Sion squatted silently on the ground while I tended to the mounts and baggage, for I did not trust him with such matters. He seemed entirely uninterested in what I was doing, but for his dull indifference I could read some intelligence in his dark eyes. After I'd wiped down the horses and set them to grazing, I turned my attention to the baggage. This included a light tent, a blanket, a wine flask, some carpentry tools, and most important of all, the unassembled components of what I called my dragon-bow.

About five feet long, midway in size between the smallest ballista and the largest windlass-cranked arbalist, it weighed just over a hundred pounds. Explaining to Sion what I wanted, I sat on the grass and watched as he knocked and pinned together the planks that made up the tripodal mounting. Then, with his help, I hefted the trough and fitted it into place, making certain it was balanced properly in the socket that allowed aim and elevation to be easily changed. A small windlass was built into the butt of the trough. With this I cranked back the bowstring and clamped it into place with the double trigger hook. It was an extremely clever and well-crafted device, which it had bloody well better be, for Fergus the armorer's service had cost me dearly. Indeed, it had taken many

wagers, including some in which I was forced to use loaded dice, to finance the dragon-bow's construction.

Next, I unwrapped the darts. These were of oak with finger-length iron heads and shafts as long as my arm. Placing one in the slotted trough I sighted on a gnarled stump and yanked the trigger hook. With a loud twang, the dart flew and struck the stump with an even louder crack, splitting the wood and burying itself almost to its finned and notched butt. Sion's face finally registered some emotion, as his lips formed a surprised "o" and curiosity kindled in his eyes. Sending him to pry loose the spent dart, I wound back the string and fitted another in its place.

"Ho, what deviltry is this, that you bring siege craft to this land?"

A mounted figure had appeared atop the rise. He wore burnished ringmail and a plumed helm and carried an ashen lance. With a loud "hallo!" he spurred his roan stallion down the slope. I drew my sword, but he reined in at twenty paces.

"What is this machine?" he asked curtly, lowering his lance in my direction. I was tempted to swivel the trough towards him, but if I missed him I'd be a dead man. Sion sat on the stump and watched impassively. Some help he was.

"I am Sir Mordred of Orkney, Knight of Camelot," I said, trying to sound haughty and disdainful. "This engine is a device with which I hope to slay the dragon that ravages these parts. Is that your quest, too?"

He did not remove his helm. "No, I care not for dragons, nor for that ridiculous and unknightly contraption with which you dishonor yourself. I am Arran, Lord of the North Border, and I have little love for Arthur's knights. My foolish cousin, Sir Owen ap Rhys, may have made craven peace with Camelot, but I have not. Knights of the Round Table come here at their peril. Few dare ride freely in these hills. None return."

I groaned. Of all the bloody luck, to be bothered with this ass now. I knew full well what he was. Arthur had secured a peaceful realm, but the velvet glove contained an iron fist that had reduced more than a few great powers in its time. There were descendants and relatives aplenty of those high lords who'd had to be beaten down before he claimed the throne. None were major political or military threats these days, but they remianed to stew in their discontent and slay such lone knights as came their way.

"I suppose you expect me to fight you." It wasn't even a question.

He nodded. I wished I could see his face. "My honor demands it."

"Your honor wouldn't buy a pig. What if I refuse?"

His laugh was hollow inside his iron helm. "Then I'll ride you down where you stand. I suggest you get your gear and mount your horse and be quick in doing it lest I become impatient."

I was still wearing my hauberk, but my helmet, shield and lance lay beside my saddle. I started toward the equipment then stopped and pointed toward a long stretch of level ground. "I'll meet you over there."

It worked. He spurred his horse in that direction, riding through the dragon-bow's line of fire. With one quick motion I whirled and slashed at the rope that held back the trigger hook. My hope had been to kill his horse, for the trough wasn't tilted high enough for the shaft to strike its rider and I had no time for aiming. The dart almost missed, tearing a furrow in the destrier's flank. But that was sufficient. The animal screamed and reared and threw its rider from his saddle in much the same manner as Gawain's mount had done the month before. Down he went,landing on his back on the trampled sward.

Immediately I was on top of him. I dropped my sword and drew my dirk and thrust it underneath his chin, prying for an opening in his mail. He shouted something, but the words were muffled by his helm. Then my blade found an egress between the steel links and the leather chin strap. Shoving back his head with my lef I drove my dagger in to its hilt. His feet kicked and his boc ped like a landed trout and then he was still and I had bl over myself.

Sion approached at a leisurely gait. "He said 'I yield,' " h mented mildly as he caught and calmed the destrier. "Can his horse?"

"What?"

"He said he yielded, but you struck him anyway. I didn't knights did that."

"Only the sensible ones." One can't have enemies running free to fight some other day. That's harsh, perhaps, but t precious little freedom in this poor world and I'm damned going to be hobbled by a conscience. Anyway, I hadn't unde what he was saying.

"Can I have the horse?" repeated Sion.

"No. It would belong to your master and I'd have to te where it came from. I don't plan to tell him I slew his cou

"You could lie. I bet you're good at that."

I gave him a cold grin. "Oh yes, very. And I'm even bet thrashing insolent knaves. I suggest that you start digging a for that idiot before I'm tempted to make myself a horsew

It took most of the afternoon to inter Sir Arran, but a few of daylight were left for Sion's practice with the dragon-bo soon became evident that his aim needed a little work, but h the makings of a good shot.

***

We'd ridden for most of the next morning when the rolling finally leveled out into a flat, grassy upland, treeless and peaty mirrored with brackish, dark-watered pools. As always, the sky lowered overhead, cold and grey and swept with heavy cl So far we'd been lucky in having little rain. In fact, we'd even a few glimpses of the sun.

At last a high tor became visible above the wasted plain. affirmed that it was our destination, the place where the dra laired.

We approached to within a quarter mile or so of it before I ed in. It was a great, steep-sided hill several hundreds of feet h covered in stubby grass except where bare rocks showed thro like weathered bones. At its summit some unknown people had ed a ring of standing stones, perhaps as squat sentinels guar a forgotten hero's grave. Our land is very old.

I kept a lookout from horseback while Sion assembled the dra bow. When he had finished I dismounted and produced a chain manacles from saddlebag. Slipping one of the shackels over his wrist, I fastened the other to the steel ring that projected fr the trough of the weapon just below the windlass.

"You don't have to do that," he said. "I won't run away."

I shook my head. "Sorry, but I'm not taking any chances, I w to make sure that you'll stay in place until dragon's within ran This insures that your life will depend on the accuracy of your sh Good luck." With that I remounted and rode toward the hil wasn't wearing any armor, for speed was all-important n Dragons are faster than they look.

I had to ride halfway around the base of the tor before I fou the lair on its eastern face. A low-ceilinged, mossy cave, it exud the smell of brimstone and musk and carrion. Spurring my hor to within thirty paces of the entrance, I cupped my hands and ga a wordless shout. It was answered by a low, harsh sound like sibilant cough. Wheeling my horse back toward the open plain looked over my shoulder. There was a rocky scrambling, the sou

ıles and claws on stone, and then the dragon emerged into ıle sunlight.

vas a mature male with a body as big as that of an ox. Its ıloned legs were like the boles of twin oaks, with its long neck ıil balanced horizontally between those great trunks. Its body ıailed in ebony scales that glittered like black diamonds, the r of an elvish prince. On its shoulders its tiny, crimson-veined ı flapped uselessly in the air. Hissing like a gigantic swan, it toward me in a series of ungainly hops, its tail twitching like of an enraged tomcat. The translucent dewlap that hung ıth its chin swelled to a milky globe and then glowed redly e fire juices kindled within.

cing my alarmed horse to keep to a brisk canter, I led the monster around the base of the tor, staying just beyond what ıertely hoped to be the range of its ready flame. The trick ı make it mad enough to actively pursue me and not just retire burrow after it had warned me off. Dragons are nocturnal ıres and don't like exerting themselves during the daytime, ially when they're very large. Reaching into the purse that at my belt, I produced a fist-sized stone. Taking aim, I heav-ıt the dragon. The missile bounced harmlessly off its armored . It shook its head, blinked, and snapped in anger. Then it ed.

dn't need to spur my destrier into a full gallop. He'd never ıained to fight dragons and had no intention of learning now. ng back, I saw that the dragon was lurching along in a series ıat leaps that practically shook the ground each time it land-s wings beat the air in a mockery of flight, as if straining st the body that had once been small enough for them to lift. ll its apparent clumsiness it appeared to be ever so slowly ıg. Ahead of me I could see Sion's bug-eyed face, a distant ıval, as he bent behind the dragon-bow. It gave me a grim action to see that his unpertubed facade had cracked at last. nded to stay within his line of fire until the dragon was well ge, then swerve aside and let him have a clear shot. That was ıan we had discussed.

the fool didn't give me a chance. When I was still a furlong I was horrified to see the dart suddenly leave the trough and toward me, its iron head growing larger and larger as it sailed ly at my face. Bloody hell! Either the idiot had panicked or ended to kill me and let the dragon eat us both. I jerked my aside so hard that something wrenched in my neck, and then issile sped past, its carved fletches tearing skin from my left Behind me I heard the dragon scream.

dart had entered its open mouth and emerged from the base skull. A flaming liquid bubbled out from between its jaws. ıped straight up, sailing so high for so long that for an im-ıle moment I thought that it had actually managed to take . Then it crashed down in a limp heap. The head and tail ıed about for quite some time, but those were the spasmodic ns of a snake crushed beneath an oxcart's wheel. I smelled ıg flesh where its own incendiary fluids had been coughed ıto its jowls and throat, which weren't protected by the mucus ined its gullet. Flames were kindled in the dry grass. Then lated throat pouch exploded, temporarily putting out the fires ıaving most of its body charred and smoking. The smell was ıribable.

shaking from my close call I dismounted and walked unsteadi-ıard Sion. It hurt whenever I moved my head and blood was ıg down my neck from my torn ear. Sion saw what was in ıce.

n sorry," he pleaded. "I got scared! It was so big. My hands know what they were doing. I didn't mean to...."

I unstrapped my scabbarded sword from my belt and thrashed him with the flat of the sheathed blade until the fleas started jumping from his sheepskin mantle.

• • •

Arthur leaned back on his throne. "I must commend your ingenuity, nephew," he said slowly. He always called me nephew, a half-truth that was really concealing a lie. "However, I cannot allow you to distribute this device throughout my realm. I take no pleasure in forbidding it, but there's no help for that. Such an invention could only create internal discord. I'm sorry. I know you meant well." There was little conviction in that last sentence.

I stood before him, stiff with surprise. "I do not understand, Your Majesty. The dragon-bow would be an invaluable asset to the kingdom. Think of how your knights would be spared such dangerous efforts, and how the outlying fiefs and manors could take responsibility for dealing with the menace themselves. Surely that could be only to the good."

He kneaded his bearded chin and looked down his acquiline nose at the embroidered hem of his sable-trimmed linen tunic. "No, it would not be only to the good. There is a danger here and I am surprised that you do not see it. Consider Sir Owen ap Rhys. Sir Owen is very grateful to you for providing him with a servant who can slay dragons. Now he need not petition me for aid in such matters. And there's the rub.

"Sir Owen comes of a family that opposed my ascension to the throne. Many of them were killed in the wars, or exiled and disinherited. By the way, were you in any way involved in the sudden disappearance of Sir Arran of the North Border?"

I kept my face blank. "No, My Leige. I have never met the man."

He looked doubtful, but let it pass. "Be glad of that. He was an enemy and I mourn him not. But back to Sir Owen. Don't you see that he is now less bound to me than he once was, for all his oath of fealty?"

I shook my head. "I do not think him capable of treason." That was a lie, of course.

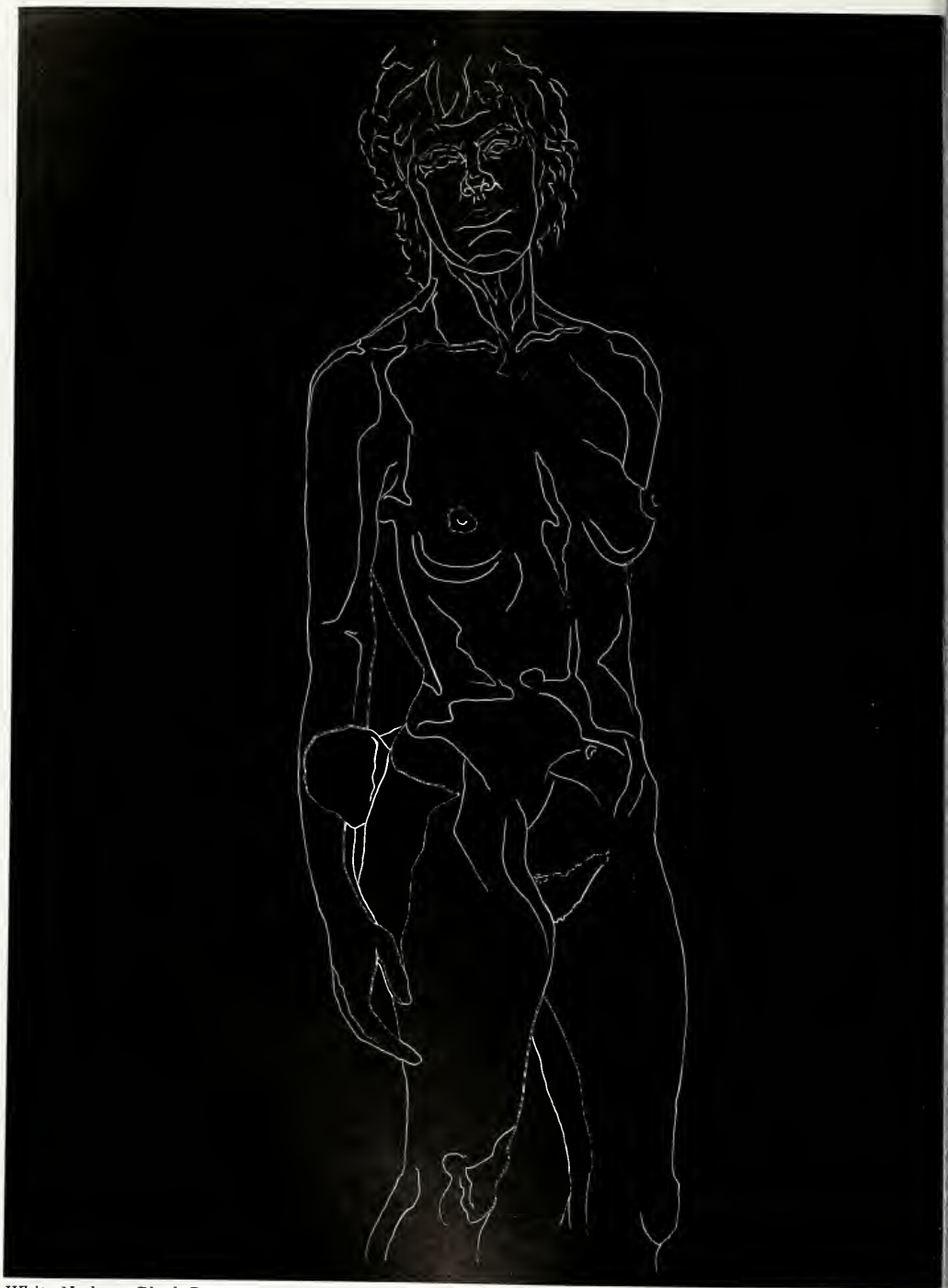
Arthur didn't believe it either. "Treason is just another name for ambition, and ambition is nourished by independence. Our social structure was created out of need, when Ambrosius Aurelanius raised common warriors to a landed aristocracy by giving them *benefices* of manors and estates in order to support themselves and allow them to fight against the Saxons. My father had the menace of those barbarians to hold the realm together. And, so did I in the early years of my reign. Now, however, there are just ideals and those are very fragile.

"Besides," he continued, "men like Lancelot and the others are like swords: they need something to sharpen themselves on lest they become blunt and dull. In the field Lancelot is an invaluable asset to my realm. Lounging at court...." He broke off and looked oddly pained. "I know that the Queen thinks otherwise, but she does not understand these maters. Do you, Mordred?"

I sighed. "Yes, Sire, I do." With that I bowed and left the room.

So much for all my efforts. Well, it had been a pleasant summer's recreation. If the realm did not want my help, that was none of my affair.

I felt oddly relieved. Some men simply are not made for altruism. It was all a jest, really, to think of what might have happened if my plans had been carried out. Why, they'd have made a saint of me, like the Irish did with Padriac after he drove the serpents from their land. That, I knew, was not to be my fate. Whistling an old improper country ballad, I strode down the marble corridor. I looked forward to returning to a life of merry self-indulgence.



White Nude on Black Paper John Marsh

The Stones

He had lived in Less Britain all his life, and the landscape there is so seamed with the stones that men do not see them any more.

Mary Stewart, *The Crystal Cave*

In my village there is a calendar
I cannot see. It is not Stonehenge
But somewhere east a field is speckled

With rocks, some huge, some more human,
But a circle I would guess they shape
If I could see. It's not the fog

Either. In June at six o'clock
The sun cuts the roofline of a barn.
At seven the cherry is on fire.

And at noon, yes, at noon, schoolchildren
Run outside, swinging their lunchboxes
When the moon is just a fingernail

On blue. But they cannot see
Either, and the cows, not even the cows
Know they're being cheated of a spot

To graze, or the swallow some gene
Has taught it's murder to fly straight.
Business as usual, but I want

To see, at least bump my head on one
And flush some stars, or crack my skull
Wide open so the druid priest

Can slip inside. Then I would know
The god that's in the stone, though when they looked
For me, no one would see.

Charles Tisdale

After Winter

Just when the bush was reduced
to sticks, just when the cold
had frozen its tender shoots, uncertain
spring gave way

to summer. Long warm days
brought up shaggy grass
from the roots. Starlings pecked
grubs and seeds

in the ruin. We let weeds
have their way. And still
new leaves forced themselves
toward light. Unkept, untended

below out kitchen window
the bush drank rain,
its leaves reached toward us
like empty hands. We should have seen

what it had made already
small figs,
the size of fingertips,
hard and green.

Mary Ellis Gibson

nted from *Coraddi* 1965

DEANNA BLAND

The Silver Man

Yellow Van at the hospital door
Mondays, he hauls out vats of developer
seeded with silver, and films
of white bone and traced circulations
kidneys leafed out as begonia
in black. He plates the metal out
and at his shop you may buy small rings
and bracelets, sometimes with turquoise.
Soft silver bends to the fine hammer.
easily finds the shape of your finger
or wrist; full when you put it on
with body humours and the observance
of disease and dust, alight
with refractions through wrinkling skin.

Rodney A. Craven

Ode to Highwatch: an Epitaph

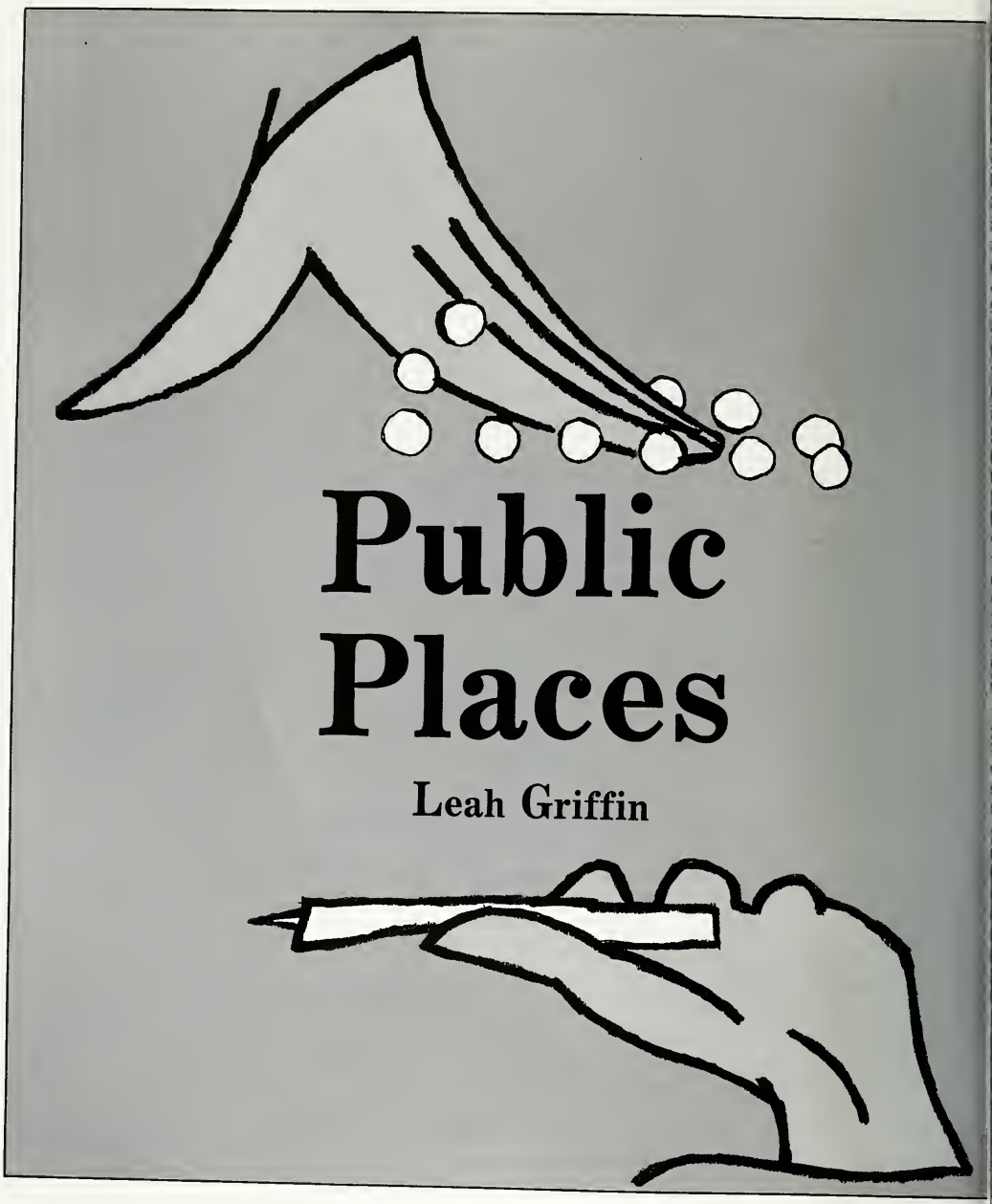
High on a plateau, proud in the Indian summer
stands a felled angel. A western wind blows cold
beneath my backyard tree he lay down for the last time.
He must have dreamed of his ancestors, they died in dignity,
in bloody battle on prairies, by natural moonlight,
not struck down by man's new riding machine.
While he lived, he lived gloriously
in a ring of bright lights and applause
he would strut grand and cavalier
a blue ribbon winner.
The call of the wild took him beyond his field,
but he was no match for the civilised world.
Tonight I shudder to the sound of a lone whinny,
a Colorado Twister stands by the light of the moon,
to watch.

Marianne Allen

Ages

A young child on Mulberry Street
A fair, blond child
a boy of ten
A blue boy on Mulberry Street
Rolled and strolled with his hoop with a stick
A long time ago
And slapped his dog
A very long time ago
He ran away from nuns
He cried in the dark
He sang
He loved a flower girl on Mulberry Street
A sweet girl
A pink girl of nineteen
They danced in the daytime
They travelled to distant lands
They dressed their children in bright colors
Happy blond children
Magical children singing on Mulberry Street

Patti Motsinger



Public Places

Leah Griffin

Walking to the Big Star, Lindy clutched her deli uniform under one arm and her Aiegner pocketbook under the other. It was only her third day at work, but the manager wanted her to run the deli all by herself. It would be only for three hours—she could handle it. She stared at the sidewalk and thought about Sissy Caj Christmas party. After years of collecting add-a-beads and Reynolds posters, Lindy had finally been invited to one of Si parties. She looked down proudly upon the thirty-one gold b

ling her neck. Well, she did have the largest add-a-bead
ce of any girl in the 10th grade. Lindy wondered whether
would think that it was uncool to work in a grocery store.
robably would, Lindy decided. However, there wasn't much
could do about it. Her mother had promptly informed her
eeks ago that if she wanted to go to college, she was going
e to help pay for it. Ever since her parents had split up, the
had been tight. There was a pair of Gloria Vanderbilt leather
that she had wanted to ask her mother to give her for
mas. But she really couldn't afford it. Lindy shook her head
arted to concentrate on the graffiti engraved into the
lk. Thinking about money made her head hurt.
words "Come Together" had been written into the sidewalk
the cement branched off into two different directions. Lin-
itated and stared at the words, even though she did want
ite for work. They seemed to shine up from the grey sidewalk.
shifted her purse to the other arm and walked on, still think-
out the phrase. John Lennon's words flowed together so well,
e words "I love you." Somehow, a whole philosophy is com-
into those two words, thought Lindy. Take the word
her." It was such a great word, even by itself. Its sound and
ng suggested unity, warmth and beauty. Put the word
," with all its sexual insinuations in front of the word
her," and you had a whole new attitude on life. Lindy smil-
thought about her English teacher, who was obsessed with
symbolism. He would have liked her theory.
ving at Big Star, she punched in two minutes late. As she
ed into her red-and-white striped deli uniform, she read the
i on the stall door. The most outstanding passage read:
ngratulations! You have just won an all-expense paid trip to
ke of Fire, IF: You have not repented and accepted Jesus
r Lord!"

boy walked into the psychiatrist's office. The room was dimly
k shelves, filled with leather-bound books, lined the walls.
octor sat in a chair beside the couch.
ghty dark in here, ain't it?" the boy said, fidgeting with his
ita-and-grey striped scarf.
doctor replied, "Have seat, Griff, and we'll get started."
, is that mandatory? I mean, I'd rather stand."
natever makes you more comfortable."
good, then I'd like to take my shoes off."
ie, fine," said the doctor, "Whatever suits you."
c, you don't mind, do you, if I ask you to take your shoes
?"
doctor was a little taken aback. "I beg your pardon?"
w you think I'm crazy, don't you?" said Griff angrily.
course not. Where would you like me to put them? My shoes,
n," the doctor said hastily.
hind the sofa, out of sight. Thanks, Doc, you're all right for
k. And don't worry, I'm not crazy. There's a perfectly logical
n why I can't stand the sight of shoes."
re to talk about it?" asked the doctor.
ell, you see, Doc, it's like my father and me don't get along.
t, we sort of hate each other. We've been fighting since I
ur. When I was about eight years old, he started telling me
wasn't ever going to amount to anything except a shoe
nan. I don't know why, but it really got to me. I've had this
up about shoes ever since. *Now* you think I'm crazy, don't
I wouldn't be here if I weren't, right?"
t necessarily. Some people just need a little help working out
problems, adjusting to society."
boy replied, "Tell *me* about society! Society thinks I'm crazy!
My father quit talking to me two years ago. My sister's friends
tell me how strange I talk. My friends tell me how strange I am.
I think my mother would like it if she could just push my dinner
under my bedroom door and then forget about me, but she feels
obligated to try and help me, so she sends me here."

"How long have you had trouble communicating with people?"

"Doc, I gave up communicating with people in the eighth grade.
Every time I said what was on my mind, everyone laughed at how
weird I was. So I adjusted, you know, adapted to the language of
my peers. And I keep on trying, but its hard. I mean, I want to
relate to people. I want to say what I say. Like, a couple of weeks
ago, I was bumming around the bus terminal. I go there sometimes
and just observe people. And I sort of struck up this conversation
with this girl. She was telling me how she wished mini-skirts would
come back in style so she could show off her legs. I mean, she wasn't
much of a looker in the face, but she had great legs, and she knew
it. You could look in her eyes and see how proud she was of her
legs. I wanted to tell her that the cripple sitting beside the newss-
tand would probably sell his mother just to have a pair of knock-
kneed wall bangers to walk on. But of course, I didn't say that.I
couldn't. I said something dumb about how great her legs were,
even in jeans. People amaze me, they really do. I mean, the whole
human race is nothing but a bunch of puny little suckers, yet every
single ant-like person walks around with so much pride and belief
in himself. Admirable, but pathetic. So you understand? I need so-
meone to understand."

"So, you liked her legs?" asked the doctor.

After Griff's session was over, he went into the bathroom in the lobby and took Mabel out of his pocket. Mabel was his trusty bright purple magic-marker, with which he left his mark on everything he encountered. On the wall of the bathroom, he started the sentence, "Oedipus Rex was a mother—." He was interrupted by another patient walking in. Griff smiled beningly and bowed to the fellow, who was carrying a flowerpot full of half-dead poinsettas.

"Oh, excuse me," the man said, obviously embarrassed at catching Griff in his act of vandalism.

"I just wanted to water my plant."

"Merry Christmas," Griff replied as he exited.

Lately Griff had taken to smoking filterless Camels and driving around in his roommate's dusty red Maverick, with a bumper sticker that read, "I slept on a VIRGIN island."

As he pulled out of the parking lot, he thought about the bullshit stories he had given the psychiatrist. He had completely fabricated both the story of his father and the story of the girl in the bus terminal. Not only were both stories bogus, but he had created then spontaneously. Sometimes, it seemed to him that he was getting a little too good at lying, and it scared him. But, as long as his parents insisted on paying a shrink to ensure his mental health, he might as well practice his story-telling talents. He started humming "That's Entertainment."

Griff drove aimlessly through the neighborhoods surrounding the university. He had three hours to kill before his anthropology class. Combing the suburban streets, he watched families go about their domestic activities: parents unloading groceries, teenagers raking lawns, and kids skirting about on dirt bikes. He started to consider his excursion as a sociological experiment. In his head, he planned a presentation, complete with slides: "My goal was to discover the essense of suburbia, and therefore, the meaning of the American people ..." he saw himself lecturing to his Anthropology class.

He turned back on the main road and hit the beginning of the urban sprawl. There was a small shopping center consisting of a Big Star, Treasury Drugs, McDonalds, and a hairstyling shop. Griff

felt hungry, so he pulled into the parking lot of the grocery store. Before he entered through the automated doors, Griff took out Mabel and wrote "Griff RULES!" on the green hood of the trashcan.

"Can I help you?" Lindy asked the boy impatiently. He had been fondling the packages of bagels and staring at her for fifteen minutes.

"Yeah," Griff grinned, embarrassed. "Um, I'd like a pound of Capitalistic bologna."

"Capitalistic bologna? Are you kidding?" Lindy retrieved her list of meats from the counter.

"All the best people eat Capitalistic bologna," Griff added, "sliced very thick."

"It says on the list that all we have is German bologna and Lebanese bologna. I'm sorry, but I've never heard of Capitalistic bologna."

Griff started to feel bad that she was actually believing him, so he said "It was a joke."

"Oh," Lindy blushed, "Look, it's only my third day of work and I'm a really gullible person anyway, so don't give me a hard time."

"Okay, I'm sorry. It was a really bad joke anyway. I'll have a ham sandwich with good ole American cheese on it."

"Are you Communist or something? How come you're so sarcastic?" Lindy demanded as she prepared his sandwich.

"Not actually Communist. Sometimes a little bit socialist. How about yourself?"

"Pure Capitalist pig. I love material wealth."

"I can tell," Griff said as he eyed her necklace. "We should discuss our philosophies in more depth. Maybe we can reach a middle ground. When do you get off work?"

Lindy almost dropped the sandwich as she was wrapping it. "Why?" she asked.

"I thought maybe we could hang out together for a while and talk."

"Tonight?"

"Or today, whenever you get off work."

"I get off at 5 o'clock—but I have plans."

"Oh, a boyfriend, right?"

"Not exactly, I'm going Christmas shopping with my mother at 7 o'clock."

"Well, then we've got two hours. I've got a late class at seven anyway."

"Oh, you go to college?" Lindy was interested. Sissy Capek definitely thought it was cool to date college boys.

"I'm a freshman at State. Unfortunately, 7:00 was the only time that they offered this Anthropology class that I wanted to take. It's kind of a drag, but what do you say? I'll take you out for ice cream or something."

Lindy felt uneasy. This guy seemed really weird, but she had nothing else to do, and Sissy would be impressed. As long as they were in a public place, she would be safe.

"All right. But I don't get off for another forty-five minutes."

"That's okay," Griff replied, "I'm content to just stand here and worship you."

"Oh, go worship the frozen foods!"

Lindy had never met a guy like this before. She turned nervously, to hide her blush, and pretended to clean the slicers.

It was five after seven when the red Maverick pulled up in front of Lindy's house.

"I drove through this neighborhood earlier today. Who could have known it was the abode of the girl I was going to fall in love with?" Griff said, turning off the engine.

"Stop exaggerating. Did you really drive by my house

"Yep, and I saw your mother out in the yard, romping with a dog."

"You did not! We don't even have a dog—even if we mother would never romp around with it."

"Maybe it was a neighbor's dog."

"What did she look like?"

"Your mother or the dog?"

"My mother."

"She was wearing a pink-and-blue flowered shower cap of sunglasses, and a Van Halen t-shirt," he said.

"You're lying again! It's another one of your stories." S ed her hand as if to hit him.

Griff took her hand and said "You're right—I was lying. think that I've ever admitted that before. I did drive do street, but I didn't see your mom. I'm sorry that I made her. I'm sure that she is just as beautiful and well-dressed are."

A light came on the front porch and the figure of Lindy's b and well-dressed mother appeared.

"I better go—mom's waiting for me to go shopping." Lind ed out of the car.

"I'll pick you up tommorrow at eight," Griff yelled out window, as he revved the engine, "And I want to meet you But tell her not to wear that shower cap—blue isn't her

Griff was twenty minutes late for class. The teacher gl him as he entered. Punctuality was not one of Griff's qualiti teacher glared again as he accidentally kicked the metal tr beside the desk. Griff took out Mabel and his notebook, a professor resumed his lecture. Griff drew a heart on the de stared at it, appalled. "My God, have I come to such trite Then he smiled and filled it in with "GRIFF LOVES LIND capped Mabel and dropped the magic marker into the tra The professor glared for the third time.

She loved the Piccadilly Cafeteria's ladies' restroom. Half bathroom was painted a hot pink and the other half was a orange. The colors clashed pleasantly to her eyes, like the in the Van Gogh paintings she was studying in school. L down at her skirt, designed by Anne Klein, she brushed an ble crumb from her hem.

Two of the three toilets in the restroom were broken. They ed continuously without human hands. The noise of the co whooshes did not bother her. Oddly enough, the chaotic sou comforting to her.

She walked out into the clean, color-coordinated resturan the soothing muzak seeping in the background. Somehow, wanted to do was run back into the bathroom, with its cea noise and its eyesore walls.

She walked out of the resturant into the bright light of the Christmas decorations were hung across the ceiling. A synt ed version of "Santa Claus is Coming to Town" played m Fingering the cold, gold balls of her add-a-bead necklace, she in front of a bogus Santa standing beside a pot with the SALVATION ARMY painted on it. Quickly, she slipped the from around her neck and dropped it in the pot. She sped she passed the fountain. The clock on the fountain said eight-f She was supposed to have met her mother fifteen minutes front of Penneys. Slowing down the pace, she stopped to l the window display of a shop specializing in imported clothes. she continued, walking slowly, toward Penneys.

Sharon Aldrich
reprinted from *Coruddi* 1963

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